



SRI AUROBINDO
and the
LOGIC of the INFINITE
ESSAYS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Rod Hemsell

SRI AUROBINDO
and the
LOGIC of the INFINITE

ESSAYS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

SRI AUROBINDO, YOGA PHILOSOPHY,
SAVITRI
THE MOTHER AND AUROVILLE
THE GLOBAL CRISIS

by Rod Hemsell

This e-book has been prepared by Auro e-Books, an international website dedicated to e-books on Well-Being and Spirituality.



Discover more e-books and other activities on our website:
www.auro-ebooks.com

Copyright 2004, 2014 Rod Hemsell
Limited Edition
Sri Aurobindo Learning Center
P.O. Box 88, Crestone, CO 81131
Published by 'SCIY' in 2006
Ebook Edition 2014

Selections from the writings of Sri Aurobindo have been
reprinted in these pages
by permission of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	2
Sri Aurobindo's Yoga Philosophy.....	4
Ken Wilber and Sri Aurobindo: A Critical Perspective.....	11
Whitehead, Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo.....	56
On Heidegger's Philosophy.....	75
Sri Aurobindo's Savitri.....	100
The Logic of the Infinite.....	113
Empirical Consilience and Transcendental Conciliation.....	120
Auroville.....	129
Auroville and the All USA Meeting 1999.....	158
Photographs.....	161
Project Proposal – Water Conservation and Resource Development in Auroville.....	167
Spirituality in Healing.....	182
Reviewing the Bush Doctrine.....	196
On the Divine Mother: A Mystery and A Prophecy.....	204
Supplements - On Mantra.....	258
Savitri Immersion Workshop.....	315
About the Author.....	318

Dedicated to Sisir Kumar Ghose
Professor of Literature at Santiniketan
Devotee of Sri Aurobindo, Lover of Savitri
Scholar, Mentor, and Friend

FOREWORD

I do not think there has been a single book published in America dedicated to the writings and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother since the 1980's; some of their major works have recently been reissued in this country by Lotus Press, but they are rarely seen on book shelves. And yet, the international township called Auroville is thriving in South India, and there is a global community that adheres to and supports the vision of human unity and spiritual transformation that is the legacy of these most remarkable seers of the 20th Century. It is because of the relative lack of resources in America, and because of my own truly incredible experiences as a resident of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville, and as a student of this philosophy and vision for the past forty years, that I have decided to publish this modest collection of essays at this time, – with the hope that it will stimulate new and renewed interest.

Many of the selections that are included have been the occasion for public presentations, – lectures, readings, workshops – and are therefore not systematic works. But I have made an effort to put the ideas of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the context of topical subjects and concerns, to many of which they have spoken directly, and I have attempted to present Sri Aurobindo's writings in the context of philosophy, where I believe they are especially relevant. I have promised myself that I will someday execute the vision of a systematic study of philosophy, based on the works of Sri Aurobindo, A. N. Whitehead, and M. Heidegger, as indicated by one of the items in this collection.

The 'global crisis' referred to in the subtitle consists in the larger general need for humanity to evolve beyond its present destructive inclinations, under which are subsumed such issues as overpopulation, war, poverty, exhaustion of natural resources, and destruction of the biosphere. It is my firm conviction that it is only through the specific radical transformations – individual and collective – proposed by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, that these issues will be effectively resolved

and surpassed.

These transformations must be extreme. For example, the transformation of human consciousness into an instrument of truth and light, instead of falsehood, and of human life and body into instruments of strength and joy instead of weakness and suffering, even to the point of eliminating the process of physical death as we know it, can now be considered real possibilities and necessities. Philosophy has always entertained the possibility of knowing and realizing the Ideal, but to actually learn to see and know Beauty to be the cause of our amazing and dubious human designs, as well as of the processes and marvels of Nature; Consciousness-Force to be the cause of our ingenious systems and inventions rather than their elusive and doubtful result; the forces of our lives and relations and experiences to be derivatives of Divine Realities in the process of unfolding, – in short, to overturn all our normal conceptions, and to change the quality of all our normal behaviors – are the methods and the goals to be realized. This is the significance, and the promise, of the New Millennium.

It may be considered unfortunate that the voluminous written works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the growing successes and renown of Auroville – symbols of the hope and promise of the New Millennium – might appear to the casual observer to signify just another monolithic institution in the making. This perception might even become a barrier to investigating and discovering the importance and relevance of these creations, at a crucial juncture for our species and for the Earth. And yet, like many paradoxes of this troubled existence, it is because of these structures of light and power that we now have the choice to discover possibilities that have never existed before, and the means to grasp the transformational energies that can radically change life as we know it. We need only look beyond the surface to find the truth, as those familiar with the vision and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo will be well aware.

Sri Aurobindo's Yoga Philosophy

Sri Aurobindo was one of the 20th Century's most prolific and eloquent philosophers, and as an Indian and Hindu thinker, he ranks with Vyasa and Shankara among that tradition's most prolific and eloquent *rishis* of all time. And, like those before him among the great Indian visionaries, Sri Aurobindo was a *yogi*, whose spiritual attainments and direct influence on his age are recognized by many to have been as great or greater than the products of his literary genius. For that reason, it is sometimes rhetorically said that he was not a philosopher at all, as he himself claimed. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo's achievements, both spiritual and literary, were enshrined in more than thirty volumes of writings, philosophical, poetic, and yogic, including such monumental works as *The Life Divine*, a systematic critique and exposition of Indian philosophical thought unparalleled in this age, original translations of and commentaries upon the great body of Hindu scripture known as Vedanta, and ultimately the epic spiritual poem *Savitri*. But perhaps the most unique aspect of his achievement, in terms of its historical circumstances, is that he wrote in a highly perfected English and thus transposed an entire spiritual and philosophical heritage originally handed down in Sanskrit, into the most widely read vernacular language of the modern world. As such, Sri Aurobindo's work is easily accessible to a very wide audience today in its original form, and the following, necessarily brief summary of his thought can at best only serve to point the reader toward this source of some of the world's richest and most profound spiritual, philosophical and literary treasures.

The Life Divine

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, – for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment, – is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality.

The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, – God, Light, Freedom, Immortality (*The Life Divine*, 1949, p.1).

If there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being with consciousness and life as its two key-terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny. The Self, the Spirit, the Reality that is disclosing itself out of the first inconscience of life and matter, would evolve its complete truth of being and consciousness in that life and matter. It would return to itself, – or, if its end as an individual is to return into its Absolute, it could make that return also, – not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completeness of itself in life. Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world-discovery, its half-fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature. (*The Life Divine*, p.1069)

These are the first and last paragraphs of Sri Aurobindo's major philosophical work, originally published serially in India from 1914 to 1919 in the monthly magazine *Arya*. The work was subsequently revised and enlarged by Sri Aurobindo around 1939-40, approximately twelve new chapters added, and the complete volume of more than a thousand pages published in book form. It has subsequently enjoyed many editions, the latest and most complete, including a glossary of Sanskrit terms, and an index, was published in 1982 by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, India. It is a singular testament to Sri Aurobindo's creative powers that this and several other of his major works, including *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Upanishads*, *The Psychology of Social Development*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, and *The Future Poetry*,

were all originally written serially and published monthly in the *Arya*, by Sri Aurobindo, along with many shorter essays, in the relatively brief period between 1914 and 1921. (Several of these were revised, and published in book form in the 1930s, and the complete works were published in 1972.)

The nature of these works and his purpose in publishing the *Arya*, were stated succinctly by Sri Aurobindo in various issues of the *Arya*, as follows:

Our idea was the thinking out of a synthetic philosophy which might be a contribution to the thought of the new age that is coming upon us. We start from the idea that humanity is moving to a great change of its life which will even lead to a new life of the race, – in all countries where men think, there is now in various forms that idea and that hope, – and our aim has been to search for the spiritual, religious and other truth which can enlighten and guide the race in this movement and endeavour. ...To grow into the fullness of the divine is the true law of human life and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of the *Arya*.

This truth had to be worked out first of all from the metaphysical point of view; for in philosophy metaphysical truth is the nucleus of the rest, it is the statement of the last and most general truths on which all others depend or in which they are gathered up. Therefore we gave the first place to the "Life Divine". Here we start from the Vedantic position, its ideas of the Self and mind and life, of Sachchidananda and the world, of Knowledge and Ignorance, of rebirth and the Spirit. But Vedanta is popularly supposed to be a denial of life, and this is no doubt a dominant trend it has taken. Though starting from the original truth that all is the Brahman, the Self, it has insisted in the end that the world is simply not-Brahman, not-Self; it has ended in a paradox. We have attempted on the contrary to establish from its data a comprehensive Advaita. We have shown that mind and life and matter are derivations from the Self through a spiritual mind or supermind which is the real support of cosmic existence and by developing mind into that man can arrive at the real truth of the spirit in the world and the real truth and highest law of life. The Self is Sachchidananda (*Divine Being*,

Consciousness-Force, Bliss) and there is no incurable antinomy between that and the world; only we have to see it through the eyes of the Knowledge. Our ignorance itself is only knowledge developing out of its involution in the apparent nescience of Matter and on its way to a return to its conscious integrality. To accomplish that return and manifest the spiritual life in the human existence is the opportunity given by the successions of rebirth. We accept the truth of evolution, not so much in the physical form given to it by the West (*ie., by Western Science*) as in its philosophical truth, the involution of life and mind and the spirit here in matter and their progressive manifestation. At the summit of this evolution is the spiritual life, the life divine. (*The Hour of God*, Sri Aurobindo Centenary Library, Vol.17, pp. 399-401)

The Life Divine is therefore a work in which certain fundamental ideas of Indian philosophy, and in particular the illusionist interpretations of the Vedanta tradition rendered by Shankara in the 8th Century, are rigorously and critically examined and challenged. And in the course of that rethinking of the tradition, all the fundamental terms and concepts of Indian spiritual and philosophical thought are elaborated, with dialectical reference to their sources and their many historical developments. Ultimately, the perennial problems of reconciling the One and the Many, the Knower and the Known, Spirit and Matter are elegantly resolved, and the way towards the necessary, logical, and realizable harmony and unity of these apparent opposites convincingly, inspiringly set forth.

Perhaps because Sri Aurobindo was a classical Greek scholar before he took up Sanskrit, – perhaps because of the massive architectural and artistic style of the work, – and perhaps because he was simply an adept dialectical and logical thinker, the development of the themes of *The Life Divine* mentioned above invite comparison with the works of several of his Western contemporaries such as Bergson, Whitehead and Heidegger. For they too developed vast new metaphysical frameworks upon the classical foundations of their cultural traditions, reinterpreting and reconstructing the ideas of Plato and Aristotle and Aquinas then seating themselves firmly but critically within the traditions of their more immediate predecessors: in Whitehead's case, for example, the English

skeptical and empirical schools of philosophy, in Heidegger's case the schools of German idealism and phenomenology. But Sri Aurobindo had chosen another tradition, another hermeneutic, and another logic, and the results in both style and substance of his work, while remaining characteristically Indian, were predictably unique and surprisingly prophetic. By rediscovering and recasting the powerfully inspiring thought and speech of the ancient seer-poets of the Vedas, Upanishads, and Gita, then interpreting and applying their visionary cosmology and psychology in terms of the dynamic metaphor of evolution, Sri Aurobindo became the messenger of a new age of spiritual thought, global synthesis, and psycho-physical transformation that is still vigorously underway at the end of the century.

The key for Sri Aurobindo, the method employed, and perhaps the most unique feature of the tradition for which he speaks, was the development of certain "supra-intellectual" or "supramental" faculties of understanding and revelatory speech recognized by and found in the Vedic, Sanskritic literary tradition, in such terms as *drsti*, *sruti*, *smriti*. As Sri Aurobindo explains in one of several essays on the Isha Upanishad, which symbolized for him the highest expression of spiritual thought and vision and became for him the basis of his philosophy:

I hold firmly the belief that the truths of the Upanishads were not arrived at by intellectual speculation, cannot be interpreted by disputation according to the rules of logic and are misused when they are employed merely as mines and quarries for the building of metaphysical systems. I hold them to have been arrived at by revelation and spiritual experience, to be records of things seen, heard and felt, *drsta*, *sruta*, *upalabdha*, in the soul and to stand for their truth not on logic which they transcend but on vision to which they aspire. These supra-intellectual faculties by which they received the Veda and developed its implications, *drsti*, *sruti*, *smrti*, are also the only means by which their thoughts can be perfectly understood.

My method does not allow me to deal with the language of the Upanishad in the spirit of the scholar, – not the pride of the Pandit dealing with words as he chooses, but the humility of the seeker after truth in the presence of one of its masters is, I have thought, the proper

attitude of the exegete. ...For ultimately, as I have already insisted, we can know the subject of the Veda only by the soul and its pure faculty of knowledge, not by verbal scholarship, metaphysical reasoning or intellectual discrimination. By entering into communion with the soul of the thinker which still broods behind the inspired language, we come to realise what he saw and what he put into his words, what waits there to make itself known to us. By communion with the soul of the Universe which is behind the soul of the thinker and one with it, we get those experiences which illumine and confirm or correct by amplifying our vision of truth in the Sruti. (Commentary on the Isha Upanishad, *Supplement*, Vol. 30, p.302)

What had been a traditional method of inspired thought and speech for the Vedic Rishis became for Sri Aurobindo the key to the knowledge he sought, and moreover the key to the process of cosmic manifestation, to self perfection (*yoga*), and to the future evolution of life on earth. For it was the "supramental truth consciousness" into which he entered by surrendering to its inspired voices, that revealed itself as the fundamental creative principle and power of existence. It was not only a power of spiritual knowledge and vision, but *cit-shakti*, the divine truth-force behind all evolution in matter, inherent in matter itself as the cause of the unfolding of all form, and the energy of transformation which, if fully liberated in our physical life, could raise this human earthly existence to a level of superhuman and divine knowing, being, living, ultimately revolutionizing and harmonizing all the circumstances of *life on earth*. It was this "supramental transformation" which became the visionary theme of all Sri Aurobindo's writing, and the aim of his Integral Yoga.

The Integral Yoga was elaborated by Sri Aurobindo primarily in *The Synthesis of Yoga* and the *Essays on the Gita*, both published serially in the *Arya* and subsequently revised and published in book form, the latter having recently been reissued with Sri Aurobindo's translations and the original Sanskrit in parallel texts, by All India Books, Pondicherry, India, 1989. But these two works are not essentially exegesis and commentary; they are original *yoga shastra* intended by the *guru* as practical instruction and guides for those inspired by his vision and

message to pursue the aim of “supramental transformation”. For, as he had stated early on in the *Arya* before his *yoga* had been fully articulated and eventually became the foundation of the spiritual life of his *ashram* and of *sadhakas* around the world, his aim was never to merely propagate a dogma or a religion, but to discover and manifest a dynamic truth-force that would transform all aspects of life:

The problem of thought is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the Self, so that it shall re-embrace, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self development so that the mental and physical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity. (*A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Radhakrishnan and Moore Eds., 1957, p.577)

Ken Wilber and Sri Aurobindo: A Critical Perspective

Part One – Wilber’s Early Works

Introduction

Ken Wilber’s work now spans two decades, from *The Atman Project* (1980), to *A Theory of Everything* (2001), and it includes some 20 books. In most of these books Sri Aurobindo’s work, especially *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, are referenced, and his language of integral transformation and spiritual evolution is frequently used. It seems to many, in fact, that Wilber has done an outstanding job of incorporating Sri Aurobindo’s ideas in a way that makes them accessible to a very large audience. For Wilber is widely read in America today, and Sri Aurobindo’s books are rarely seen on bookshelves.

But it is rather extraordinary at the same time, that in all those thousands of pages, there is hardly a page all together of direct quotes from Sri Aurobindo, very little that is direct commentary on his work, and the references are usually to a list of names, among which Sri Aurobindo is included. To give a typical example, from *Integral Psychology* (2000), “Like all truly great integral thinkers – from Aurobindo to Gebser to Whitehead to Baldwin to Habermas – he (Abraham Maslow) was a developmentalist.” And so, one might well ask what actually remains of Sri Aurobindo after his ideas are incorporated, along with all of the other many sources that Wilber’s genius has so skillfully worked into his voluminous synthesis, and what is there that is truly Wilber’s? In fact, it may be noted that the other illustrious sources that Wilber frequently refers to are also generally not quoted directly; one must either already be familiar with them, or else assume that Wilber is doing them justice.

The goals of this essay, therefore, are to present a summary of various essential aspects of Wilber’s work, hopefully in a way that makes it more

accessible to those who are not already familiar with it, and then to submit these aspects to a critical comparison with specific related aspects of Sri Aurobindo's work. ("Work" is used here in a dual sense: the written work of these authors, and the practical thrust, purpose, intent of their writing in the context of our actual human predicament.) For those who are familiar with both authors, there will be little that is new or unknown here. But the critical perspective that I hope to present should help to clarify the relationship of Wilber's writing to that of Sri Aurobindo, and it should highlight the unique contribution that each has made to their common project: the evolution of consciousness. I shall assume that most readers of this essay will not have extensive knowledge of the writings of Wilber.

The Atman Project

Wilber is a transpersonal, developmental psychologist, who has attempted to map the entire territory of human development – "the evolution of consciousness" – through time, and to formulate a comprehensive theory of the processes, stages, and mechanisms of that development. His method is historical, analytical and contemplative: he attempts to synthesize all the relevant views of philosophy, psychology, and religion, East and West, in support of what he calls an "integral theory of consciousness." Let me hasten to say that one can only respect and admire the persistence, scope, clarity and integrity of purpose with which he has carried his project forward. It seems to have begun with the theory that he calls "the Atman Project," and although it appears, from the scope of his writings, that he has moved well beyond that point in his own development, let us begin there.

In the very first sentence of the Preface to that book, Wilber states the theory:

... development is evolution; evolution is transcendence...; and transcendence has as its final goal Atman, or ultimate Unity Consciousness in only God. All drives are a subset of that Drive, all wants a subset of that Want, all pushes a subset of that Pull – and that

whole movement is what we call the Atman-project: the drive of God towards God, Buddha towards Buddha, Brahman towards Brahman, but carried out initially through the intermediary of the human psyche, with results that range from ecstatic to catastrophic. (p.ix)

At the very outset, Wilber also states a corollary of this theory, for which he is well known, – the “pre/trans fallacy,” which qualifies his position with respect to the developmental theories of both Jung and Sri Aurobindo. If, as Wilber says, the evolution of consciousness spans three broad stages from pre-egoic to egoic to transpersonal, a spectrum of development that is recapitulated in every human being, it is a mistake to confuse the pre-egoic, unconscious, uroboric stage with the transpersonal, integrated, transcendent stages of development, as if the higher consisted in a return to and recapture of the lower. This seminal distinction marks the point of departure for Wilber, sets the direction of all his future work, and establishes the terminology that he will use. For the student of Sri Aurobindo, this may call to mind occasional remarks made by Sri Aurobindo about Western psychology, to the effect that it tries to explain the lotus by analyzing the mud. Wilber seems to agree with this sentiment. A few excerpts from *The Atman Project* will illustrate this development in his thought.

The infantile fusion-state is indeed a type of “paradise,” as we will see, but it is one of pre-personal ignorance, not transpersonal awakening. The true nature of the pre-personal, infantile fusion state did not dawn on me until I ran across Piaget’s description of it: ‘The self at this stage is material, so to speak...’ And material union is the lowest possible unity of all – there is nothing metaphysically “high” about it; the fact that it is a unity structure, prior to subject-object differentiation, erroneously invites its identification with the truly higher unity structures which are trans-subject/object. At the point that became obvious to me, the whole schema that I had presented in *ReVision* (a journal of transpersonal psychology edited by Wilber) re-arranged itself...

I have reserved “uroboros” for the pre-personal state of infantile material fusion (along with “pleroma”); “centaur” is now reserved strictly for the mature integration of body and ego-mind, and “typhon” is

introduced for the infantile period of pre-differentiation of body and ego (Freud’s “body-ego” stages); “transpersonal” refers strictly to the mature, adult forms of transcendence of the ego-mind and body; my use of the terms “evolution” and “involution” has been brought into accord with that of Hinduism (e.g., Aurobindo), and my original use of those terms (based on Coomaraswamy) has been replaced by the terms “Outward Arc” and “Inward Arc.” (p.x)

In the next few pages of the prologue to *The Atman Project*, Wilber presents the first of many diagrams of psychological development, describing the Outward and Inward Arcs. The Outward Arc of development includes the sequence: pleroma, uroboros, bodyego, membership-cognition, early and middle ego/persona, late ego/persona; the Inward Arc of development includes the stages: mature ego, biosocial bands, centaur/existential, subtle, causal, Atman. These consecutive stages of ascending development are also presented in the form of a chart (simplified here):

	Wilber	Aurobindo	Maslow	Loevinger
1	Pleromatic	Subconscious	Physiological	Presocial
2	Uroboric			Symbiotic
3	Axial-body	Physical	Beginning of safety	Impulsive
4	Pranic-body	Vital		
5	Image-body	Emotional		
6	Membership-cognition	Will	Safety	Self-protective
7	Early egoic	Reasoning mind	Belongingness	Conformist
8	Middle egoic	Physical ego		Conscientious conformist
9	Late egoic	Idea mind	Self-esteem	Conscientious
10	Mature ego			Individualistic
11	Biosocial centaur Existential centaur	Higher mind	Self-actualization	Autonomous Integrated
12	Low subtle	Illumined mind	Transcendence	
13	High subtle	Intuitive mind		
14	Low causal	Overmind		
15	High causal	Supermind		
16	Ultimate	Brahman/ Paramatman		

This conception of the stages of development will evolve in Wilber's writing through many versions and many books, but will retain the same basic structure. And it will frequently be compared with other developmental models. For example, at the end of *The Atman Project*, Wilber provides several charts that compare his system with some twenty other similar developmental models. The chart I have reproduced here is based on his comparisons with just three other frequently mentioned models. As I said, these comparative models have been elaborated and have evolved throughout Wilber's work, and he uses them effectively to illustrate his point. The general idea of psychological development, the way that it has been drawn from a variety of sources, and, most importantly, his inclusion of the higher mental and spiritual ranges, roughly in accordance with Sri Aurobindo's system, are made sufficiently clear.

The major thesis, and the method to be applied in establishing it, are immediately set forth in *The Atman Project* (p. 2-3):

Modern developmental psychology has, on the whole, simply devoted itself to the exploration and explanation of the various levels, stages, and strata of the human constitution – mind, personality, psychosexuality, character, consciousness. The cognitive studies of Piaget and Werner, the works of Loevinger and Arieti and Maslow and Jakobson, the moral development studies of Kohlberg – all subscribe, in whole or part, to the concept of stratified stages of increasing differentiation, integration, and unity. Having said that much, we are at once entitled to ask, "What, then, is the highest stage of unity to which one may aspire?" Or, perhaps we should not phrase the question in such ultimate terms, but simply ask instead, "What is the nature of some of the higher and highest stages of development? What forms of unity are disclosed in the most developed souls of the human species?" The problem with that type of question lies in finding examples of truly higher-order personalities – and in deciding exactly what constitutes a higher-order personality in the first place. My own feeling is that as humanity continues its collective evolution, this will become very easy to decide, because more and more "enlightened" personalities will show up in data populations, and psychologists will be forced, by their statistical analyses, to include higher-order profiles in their

developmental stages. In the meantime, one's idea of "higher-order" or "highly-developed" remains rather philosophic. Nonetheless, those few gifted souls who have bothered to look at this problem have suggested that the world's great mystics and sages represent some of the very highest, if not the highest, of all stages of human development.

...Let us then simply assume that the authentic mystic-sage represents the very highest stages of human development – as far beyond normal-and-average humanity as humanity itself is beyond apes. This, in effect, would give us a sample which approximates "the highest state of consciousness" – a type of "superconscious state."

In accordance with this assumption, Wilber includes in his developmental model, as we have seen, an upper tier of higher stages of consciousness: "low subtle," "high subtle," "low causal," "high causal," and "ultimate," corresponding roughly to the upper categories defined by Sri Aurobindo. Wilber frequently reduces his upper tier to four categories: psychic, subtle, causal, nondual. And he often explains these by comparison with the Buddhist categories: Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, Dharmakaya, Svabhavikakaya. (His sources for this terminology appear to be, primarily, Evans-Wentz and D.T. Suzuki.)

Involution/Evolution

In both *The Atman Project* and its successor, *Up from Eden* (1981), Wilber devotes most of his thesis to a detailed description of the unfolding of the lower stages of human development, from the uroboric and typhonic to the mental egoic and centauric levels, utilizing familiar Freudian and Jungian concepts and terminology. In *Up from Eden*, the exposition deals primarily with the cultural myths and symbols that indicate a parallel development in the collective psyche of humanity. And in both books, the dynamics and the mechanics of involution and evolution that underlie and drive the process of psychological unfolding called the Atman-project are elaborated. In this theory, the traditional psychoanalytic dynamics of repression and sublimation, and the playing out in the human psyche of the struggle between Life and Death, Eros and Thanatos, are shown to be, rather than the repression of sexuality,

the repression of the soul through the involution of spirit, and its sublimation in the stages of evolution back towards spirit. A few selections from these early books will serve to illustrate Wilber's argument and style, as well as to bring us up to speed with this psychoanalytical/spiritual way of viewing the human psyche.

The Atman-project

The ultimate psychology is a psychology of fundamental Wholeness, or the superconscious All. At any rate, let us simply note that this Wholeness...is what is real and all that is real. A radically separate, isolated and bounded entity does not exist anywhere.

It follows, then, that to erect a self-boundary or barrier, and hold a separate-identity feeling against the prior Wholeness, not only involves illusion, it requires a constant expenditure of energy, a perpetual contracting or restricting activity. This of course obscures the prior Wholeness itself, and this...is the primal repression. It is the illusory repression of universal consciousness and its projection as an inside-self vs. an outside-world, a subject vs. an object. ...

Because man wants real transcendence above all else, but because he cannot or will not accept the necessary death of his separate-self sense, he goes about seeking transcendence in ways, or through structures, that actually prevent it and force symbolic substitutes. And these substitutes come in all varieties: sex, food, money, fame, knowledge, power – all are ultimately substitute gratifications, simple substitutes for true release in Wholeness. ...This attempt to regain Atman consciousness in ways or under conditions that prevent it and force symbolic substitutes – this is the Atman-project. (p.102-103)

Uroboric Incest

...The neonate begins to realize that the environment and his self are not one and the same. The infant starts to recognize that something exists apart from his self, and this "global something" we call the "uroboric other." ...uroboric incest is the tendency to fall back into embryonic and pleromatic states – we would say, the desire to unite with the uroboric other and sink back into pre-differentiated oblivion. ...

In other words, uroboric incest is simply the most primitive form of

Eros, the most archaic and least developed form of the Atman-project. Uroboric incest is the tendency to seek out that lowest-level unity of all – simple material embeddedness, wherein all conscious forms melt back into the utter darkness of the prima materia.

...But as soon as the self is strong enough to accept the death of the uroboros, as soon as the self can surrender or die to the exclusively uroboric incest, then Thanatos outweighs Eros, uroboric translation ceases and transformation upward ensues. (p. 112-114)

The Atman-project in the Typhonic Realms

...But as the organism itself begins to mature physiologically, and especially in its capacity for imagery, the primitive uroboric self-feeling begins to shift to the individual bodyself, and the uroboric other begins to focus as the “mothering one.” The infant thus begins to grow out of the purely pre-personal and uroboric realm into the typhonic plane of existence, where it will face the existential battle of being vs. nullity, a battle centered around the figure – now loving, now terrifying, now benevolent, now devouring – of the Great Mother...the infant at this stage translates his situation (in images) so as to present itself as the center of the cosmos by – as psychoanalysis puts it – “incorporating” or “swallowing” the world (the Great Mother), or just initially the “breast” in image form.

And so the infant proceeds to translate his self and his world, attempting to gain some sort of prior Unity. In this manner, then, we can view the stock in trade phenomenon of psychoanalysis: infantile thumb-sucking. For by virtue of the magical primary process which, as we saw, dominates this body level, the infant can translate the Great Environment or Great Mother into the breast-image, into the thumb-image, and thus...he can pretend to unite himself with his world. ...To find Atman, to find Unity, the infant eats the world, the Great Mother. (p. 114-116)

Before going on to examine Wilber’s attempt to explain this psychoanalytic picture of development in terms of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of evolution, and then putting the Atman-project in a more critical perspective, I would like for us to look briefly at Wilber’s characterization of the Great Mother/Great Goddess transformation, in *Up From Eden* (1981). In this book, the author applies the Atman-project

theory to the evolution of human society and culture, which is documented in detail and moves along a similar path of unfolding, from the uroboric to the typhonic to the mythic-membership stage. The latter is parallel to the next stage of ego differentiation in the individual, beyond the typhonic body-ego: the formation of an early stage mental-ego, which takes place primarily through verbal development and various forms of parental fixation. So for mankind and its cultures, the uroboric Eden is superseded by the typhonic, magic-hunter stage, and then by the mythic-membership stage, which includes the emergence of agriculture, ritual sacrifice, and symbolic religion. As in individual development, these stages of social development are all, of course, successive substitutes – “substitute subjects, substitute objects, substitute sacrifices, immortality projects, cosmocentric designs and tokens of transcendence” – for the real unity of the Atman.

Wilber’s account of the historical transition from the practice of physical sacrifice made to the Great Mother, to symbolic sacrifice made to the Great Goddess, is presented as a definitive example of the upward evolution of consciousness in early human societies, and is particularly relevant in the context of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual philosophy, as a few brief excerpts should show.

The Great Mother/Great Goddess

The Great Mother, then, is initially representative of global, bodily, separate, and vulnerable existence in space and time, with consequent desires for a Great Protectress and consequent fears of a Great Destroyer. And it is not hard for me to imagine that something very similar occurred to mankind on the whole as it emerged from its collective slumber in the uroboric Eden. ...The Great Mother came thus to represent bodily existence itself, matter and nature, water and earth, and life and death in the naturic realm.

...To the primitive it was obvious: the menstrual blood flow of the woman continues periodically throughout her maturity – except when she is pregnant. And thus it is this “withheld” menstrual blood that is being converted into the form of a living baby and new life. And therefore the Great Mother needs blood in order to bring forth new life. And this equation was supplemented by the otherwise quite accurate

perception that bodily life depends on blood: take away blood, and you take away life. For either or both of these reasons, the conclusion was obvious: just as the earth needs rain to bring forth crops, the Great Mother needs blood to bring forth new life.

When we put these two symbolic equations (of the dead and resurrected lunar-god consort and the blood sacrifice for life) together, we straightforwardly arrive at the perfect logic of the early rites of human sacrifice: the symbolic consort (human or animal) is sacrificed in blood to the Great Mother, dies, and is resurrected (after three days according to many myths). In fact, the Great Mother follows the dead god-consort into the dark underworld, and there effects his resurrection, thus ensuring another cycle of new life and new fertility and new moon. In the sacrifice itself, the god-consort is actually uniting with the Great Mother, and thus himself is reborn or resurrected (becoming in the process, the father of himself.)

For the essence of the Great Mother is that she demanded the dissolution, the sacrifice, of the separate self. Let us note that: the Great Mother demands the dissolution of the self. But the self can dissolve in two entirely different directions: one, it can dissolve in transcendence, it can fall forward into superconsciousness. But two, it can dissolve in regression, in a falling back into the subconscious, in an obliteration of personality and not a transcendence of it. And whereas, for a very few, the Mother was, and still is, the portal to subtle superconsciousness, the way to transcend the personality, she was for most that terrible form of inertia which prevented the emergence, out of the uroboros and typhon, of a truly strong personality.

Put in a different way: a given rite, ceremony, sacrament, or myth can function as a symbol, in which case it evokes higher levels of self and reality, or as a mere sign, in which case it simply confirms and strengthens the same mundane level of self and reality. That is, a given rite or sacrament can serve as a symbol of transformation or as a sign of translation. The first function is properly religious (esoteric), and works to undermine or dissolve self in God consciousness; whereas the second function is merely substitutive, and serves to perpetuate and strengthen the self sense by securing magical substitutes for God. (p. 119-135)

This very severely abbreviated example, is only one among many myths

recounted in *Up From Eden* to illustrate the evolution of human societies and cultures, and to illustrate the mechanism of repression and sublimation of the self which the Atman-project theory endeavors to explain. But this particular example is important to include here especially because of the central importance of the Divine Mother as Mahashakti or Supermind in Sri Aurobindo's cosmology, and as Transformative Force in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. It is curious, however, that Wilber *never* mentions this aspect of Sri Aurobindo's work, that I am aware of. And I find this omission significant in particular because *Savitri* is not only Sri Aurobindo's most important written work, but in it the goddess both symbolizes and concretely illustrates the spiritual level of the myth that Wilber interpreted at the ritual and symbolic levels in an early, pre-modern society. But the "spiritual" level of interpretation, which would show the Great Goddess also to be a "real force" for transformation at the post-egoic, and post-modern stage of development seems to have been missed – an oversight which I believe has bearing on Wilber's application of Sri Aurobindo's concept of involution and evolution, and on our interpretation of that application, to which we shall now turn. It is in *Savitri* (1950), Sri Aurobindo's epic poem of spiritual transformation, let us note, that the emerging planes, forms, and structures of evolutionary consciousness are described, in images and ideas similar to the psychological schemas and symbols analyzed by Jung, Gebser, and Wilber. But in Sri Aurobindo's vision, ascending Nature (the Great Mother) and descending Consciousness-force (the Great Goddess) are guided at every step by the indwelling self or spirit, and their intersection is the unfolding manifestation in time.

In both of the books that we have been considering in Part One of this essay, *The Atman Project, A Transpersonal View of Human Development*, and *Up From Eden, A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution*, Wilber has formulated his theory of the Atman-project in great detail. And near the end of both books he has included a section on Involution and Evolution, where he has made reference to Sri Aurobindo. This is an especially important aspect of Wilber's theory because it provides the philosophical basis, the essential reason and meaning for the unfolding

process of the Self in evolution. Without such a basis, the traditional theory of repression and sublimation based on sexuality, like Darwin's theory of evolution based on natural selection, both of which lack the notion of a "telos" – a purpose and direction (other than 'survival' or 'pleasure'), would seem just as adequate. It is for this reason, I believe, that Sri Aurobindo devoted his major philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, to establishing just such a metaphysical basis for his theory of the evolution of consciousness, – in order to achieve a more meaningful, more adequate, more profound explanation of the basis of human life and existence in general. The question here is whether Wilber has succeeded in providing his theory of psychological development with the foundation it needs, by his application of the theory of evolution drawn from Sri Aurobindo.

Wilber introduces the subject, the "what" of involution and evolution, in *The Atman Project*, like this:

We have already examined evolution, which is the movement of the world towards Brahman-Atman. Involution is, more or less, the opposite of that – it is the movement whereby Brahman throws itself outward to create the manifest worlds, a process of kenosis or self-emptying which, at the same time, is a process of pure act and pure creativity. As evolution is movement from the lower to the higher, involution is a movement from the higher to the lower – a movement which "enfolds" and "involves" the higher levels of being with the lower.

...in order for evolution – which is the unfolding of higher structures – to occur at all, those higher structures must, in some sense, be present from the start: they must be enfolded as potential, in the lower modes. ...And the story of involution is simply the story of how the higher modes came to be lost in the lower – how they came to be enwrapped and enfolded in the lower states.

And then, in order to tell the story of the "how," Wilber turns immediately to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and its account of the soul's journey in the "in between."

Thus, there are two major bardos or "in between" – one occurs as a series of temporal events lasting up to 49 days after physical death, and

the other occurs now, moment to moment. And the Tibetan tradition adds one simple and crucial point: these two bardos are the same. What happened to you before you were born is what is happening to you now.

... Immediately following physical death, the soul enters the Chikhai, which is simply the state of the immaculate and luminous Dharmakaya, the ultimate Consciousness, the Brahman-Atman. ...

The soul falls away from the ultimate Oneness because “karmic propensities cloud consciousness” – karmic propensities means seeking, grasping, desiring: means, in fact, Eros. And as this Eros-seeking develops, the state of perfect Oneness starts to “break down.” ... Contraction and Eros – these karmic propensities couple and conspire to drive the soul away from pure consciousness and downwards into multiplicity, into less intense and less real states of being. ...right here the soul is starting to move from the highest state into lower states, which means that involution itself has just started.

... at each stage of involution, the soul constructs a substitute self and a substitute world. The causal, the subtle, the mental and the bodily – all were created as substitute formations to present the self as deathless, god-like, immortal and cosmocentric. ...

But since each of these “steps down” is accompanied by a swoon of forgetfulness, the entire sequence is rendered unconscious – rendered unconscious – not destroyed, not removed, not vacated... Which means: all of the higher levels are present, but they are simply forgotten... And, very simply, the result of that entire sequence of forgetting is the ground unconscious. Thus enfolded and enwrapped in the ground unconscious of the newborn lie all the higher states of being.

And here, finally, is the other meaning of the Bardo, of the In Between, and if you feel that “reincarnation” or “rebirth” is unacceptable, then this might be easier to accept... not only did the whole involutionary series occur prior to one’s birth, one re-enacts the entire series moment to moment. ...This moment to moment phenomenon we call “microgeny” – the micro-genetic involution of the spectrum of consciousness. Each moment, the individual passes through the entire Bardo sequence – ultimate to causal to subtle to

mental to gross – and he remembers only to the extent he has evolved. If an individual has evolved to the subtle realm, then he will remember the gross, mental, and subtle aspects of consciousness, but he will not remember the causal and ultimate aspects of this moment's experience: they remain in the emergent unconscious, awaiting emergence via remembrance. Evolution is simply the interception of micro-involution at higher and higher stages: the more evolved a person is, the less involved he is. (p. 160-175)

Now, Wilber has said repeatedly throughout this originally lengthy and detailed description of the “how” of involution, that it is “simply” put. But it is nevertheless obviously quite complicated. Moreover, I have omitted the explanation of the Eros/Thanatos struggle that mediates the remembering at each moment of ascent and descent. It is described as a vertical struggle between the pull of Atman at one end and Contraction at the other, and a horizontal struggle between Eros at one end and Thanatos at the other. The developing soul is driven by Eros towards substitutes, until it can die to that drive and be pulled away by Thanatos, so it can then emerge upward towards Atman before contracting back down to a lower level of Eros-substitution. The downward movement of the soul in involution is like a ball bouncing down stairs on an elastic band, until it reaches its nadir and then begins to be pulled in all directions by its karmic propensities.

The whole process looks remarkably like a description of what makes the wheel of karma spin. And perhaps it suggests more questions than it answers, not least of which is the big “Why”? But before we attempt to find that one out, it is interesting to note that on the page where we left off, there occurs the one and only reference to Sri Aurobindo in this section, and a quote. Wilber writes:

The higher modes can emerge because, and only because, they were enfolded, as potential, in the lower modes to begin with, and they simply crystallize out and differentiate from the lower modes as evolution proceeds. This is exactly what Aurobindo means when he says: “Since this Consciousness [ultimate Brahman-Atman] is creatrix of the world, it must be not only state of knowledge, but power of knowledge, and not only a will to light and vision, but a will to power

and works. And since mind, too, is created out of it [Atman], mind must be a development by limitation out of this primal faculty and this...supreme consciousness [that "development by limitation" is precisely involution] and must therefore be capable of resolving itself back into it through a reverse development by expansion [and that is evolution].

The highlights and brackets in this quote are all Wilber's, and the reference is to a selection from *The Life Divine* included in an anthology of Indian Philosophy edited by S. Radhakrishnan (1973, p.598). It is possible to trace it back to the original, which is in *The Life Divine*, Chapter XIV, The Supermind As Creator. There, Will and Mind are capitalized. The "consciousness" that is being spoken of is Supermind, not Atman. The last sentence reads, "And since Mind too is created out of it, Mind must be a development by limitation out of this primal faculty and this mediatory act of the supreme Consciousness." Sri Aurobindo then goes on to say,

For always Mind must be identical with Supermind in essence and conceal in itself the potentiality of Supermind, however different or even contrary it may have become in its actual forms and settled modes of operation. It may not then be an irrational or unprofitable attempt to strive by the method of comparison and contrast towards some idea of the Supermind from the standpoint and in the terms of our intellectual knowledge. ...Supermind is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops. ...It possesses the power of development, of evolution, of making explicit, and that power carries with it the other power of involution, of envelopment, of making implicit. In a sense, the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions, Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downward to the other pole of Matter, Matter in which all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of Spirit. ...The first business of Mind is to render "discrete," to make fissures much more than to discern, and so it has made this paralysing fissure between thought and reality. But in Supermind all being is consciousness, all consciousness is of being, and the idea, a pregnant vibration of consciousness, is equally a vibration of being, pregnant of itself; it is an initial coming out, in creative self-knowledge, of that which

lay concentrated in uncreative self-awareness. It comes out as Idea that is a reality, and it is that reality of the Idea which evolves itself, always by its own power and consciousness of itself, always self-conscious, always self-developing by the will inherent in the Idea, always self-realising by the knowledge ingrained in its every impulsion. This is the truth of all creation, of all evolution. (p. 115-122)

I have followed out this quotation at some length in order to show the depth and scope of the ideas of involution and evolution in Sri Aurobindo's thought, from which Wilber seems to have drawn only a portion of his understanding. What he has left out, or not grasped, and which is of considerable importance to this Vedantic conception, is the idea of Supermind as the Creatrix, the Mediatrix, or creative Consciousness-Force of the Brahman responsible for each moment of the involutory/evolutionary cycle. And the stress here is on Conscious Being, and on Existence, which is all inclusive. In Sri Aurobindo's conception, this process of involution and evolution is conscious, harmonious, divine, at every level. It is only Mind which experiences the illusion of fragmentation, and the Ego which experiences the separate-self, and Life which undergoes the struggle of Eros/Thanatos. But the reality is quite other than the interpretation given to it by Mind focusing on these various levels of experience, until it is able to rise into that which is its container and its real originating substance. It is possible that Wilber could have derived the notion of involution and evolution from this paragraph, but not the complicated process of forgetting and remembering that he has constructed, and not the microgeny which gives rise to the spectrum of consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo, the so called "structures of consciousness" or levels of the Great Chain of Being, in Wilber's system, are inherent aspects of Conscious Being, enfolded and unfolded, by the creative Will-Force inherent in them.

In his chapter on the same subject in *Up From Eden*, which he also concludes with a quote from Sri Aurobindo, the focus is on the larger, cosmic and collective as well as individual human picture, and he comes closer to the problem of the "Why," while stressing the positive role of the illusory ego-mind in its evolutionary ascent from the unconscious to the superconscious. He still doesn't endow the process with much

dynamism or will-power, but he does seem to credit the Brahman with a little more responsibility and creative gusto, at least initially.

He writes, in the section titled Involution and Evolution,

To begin with, we need only recall that all esotericism subscribes to the view that reality is hierarchal, or composed of successively higher levels of reality (or, more accurately, levels of decreasing illusion), reaching from the lowest material plane to the ultimate spiritual realization. This is the universal Great Chain of Being, ...some of the major links (of which) are: 1) physical, material nature, 2) the biological body, 3) the lower mind (verbal membership), 4) the advanced mind (egoic conceptual), 5) the lower soul (psychic level, Nirmanakaya), 6) the higher soul (subtle level, Sambhogakaya), 7) the Spirit (as Limit, Dharmakaya), and 8) the Spirit (as Ground, Svabhavikakaya).

According to this cosmology/psychology, the ultimate Brahman-Atman periodically "gets lost" – for the fun and sport (lila) of it – by throwing itself outward as far as possible: to see how "far out" it can get. ...But in so doing, in initiating this great sport and play, Spirit temporarily "forgets" itself and thus "loses" itself in successively lower levels. That is, since Spirit successively "forgets" itself in each descending level, each level actually consists of successively decreasing consciousness. The Great Chain thus descends from superconsciousness to simple consciousness to subconsciousness. (p. 300)

He later rephrases this notion of the creative beginning of evolution with a more Western, mythological image:

We have seen two major events, both of which have been described, appropriately enough, as "falls" – the scientific fall and the theological fall. And we put the two falls together in this fashion: beginning approximately 15 billion years ago, the material cosmos – which represents the most alienated form of Spirit – blew into sole existence with the Big Bang, which was really the roaring laughter of God voluntarily getting lost for the millionth time. That was the limit of involution, and it represented the epitome of the theological fall – the illusory separation of all things from Godhead. From that point on, evolution back to Spirit began, an evolution which produced, in the

actual course of history and prehistory, successively higher-order levels – mineral, plant, lower animal, primate, man – but all were still in a state of original sin, or apparent alienation from Spirit. (p. 311-312)

Harking back to the “pre/trans fallacy,” Wilber has given an interesting interpretation in this section of his book to the myth of the Fall. He speculates that the original “theological” Fall was in fact the involution of Spirit, while what he calls the “scientific” Fall occurred, symbolically, in the departure from the Garden of Eden, when mankind realized its vulnerability and separate-self sense, left the uroboros stage, and began the awakening of ego-mind, which is the real beginning of the ascent back to Spirit. To support this thesis, he draws on three philosophical authorities – Hegel, Berdyaev, and Sri Aurobindo. He writes,

I am not alone in this overall view. Sri Aurobindo, India’s greatest modern sage, has written on just this viewpoint – Brahman getting lost in involution and then evolving back – from matter to prana to mind to over-mind to super-mind and Atman, and he sees it occurring cosmologically as well as psychologically. (p. 313)

This historical development, or actualization of Spirit by Spirit, occurs, according to Hegel, in three major stages (stages which correspond precisely with our realms of sub-, self-, and super-consciousness). The first is that of *Bewusstsein*, which is bodily awareness, or the sensory perception of an external world without any mental reflection or self-consciousness. It corresponds with our subconscious realm (uroboric and typhonic). The second phase is that of *Selbstbewusstsein*, self-awareness and mental reflection – our realm of self-consciousness. More specifically, during this period of self-consciousness there occurs, according to Hegel, “the unhappy consciousness,” the “divided consciousness,” “self-alienated” – because of the stresses involved in self-consciousness itself. This is our “fallen egoic consciousness,” the scientific fall, whose genesis we have traced. Hegel’s third phase is that of *Vernunft*, or transcending knowledge, “the synthesis of objectivity and subjectivity,” Spirit knowing Spirit as Spirit, which for us is the superconscious. (p. 314-315)

Berdyaev zeroes in on the precise heart of the historical Eden and Paradise: “Not everything was revealed to man in paradise, and ignorance was the condition of life in it. It was the realm of the

unconscious. ...After the Fall [self-] consciousness was needed to safeguard man from the yawning abyss below [the Devouring Mother]. But [self-] consciousness also shuts man off from the superconscious, divine reality and prevents intuitive contemplation of God... And in seeking to break through to superconsciousness, to the abyss above [the Void], man often falls into the subconscious – the abyss below. In our sinful world consciousness means... dividedness, pain and suffering... Unhappy consciousness can only be overcome through super-consciousness. (p. 316-317)

We can finish this section with a concluding remark from Aurobindo, for he expressed precisely the same sentiments: “For actually we see... the universe start with a subconscious [state] which expresses itself openly [but with minimal or “superficial awareness”]. In the conscient [self-conscious realm] the ego becomes the superficial point at which the awareness of unity can emerge; but it applies its perception of unity to the form and surface action [this misapplication of Unity to “the surface form” is precisely the Atman project] and, failing to take account of all that operates behind, fails also to realise that it is not one in itself but one with others. This limitation of the universal “I” [Atman] in the divided ego-sense constitutes our imperfect individualised personality. But when the ego transcends the personal consciousness, it begins to include and be over-powered by that which is to us superconscious; it becomes aware of the cosmic unity and enters into the transcendent Self [Atman]. (p. 318)

Again, the quote is taken from Radhakrishnan (1973, p. 587), and it can be traced back to *The Life Divine*, Chapter V, The Destiny of the Individual. And again, a number of questions can be raised in the context of Wilber’s interpretation. The first sentence in the original says, “For actually we see that the Many objectivised in form in our material universe start with a subconscious unity which expresses itself openly enough in cosmic action and cosmic substance, but of which they are not themselves specifically aware.” And where he puts Atman in brackets, the original continues “which here cosmos expresses by a multiple oneness” (p. 40). The first problem to be addressed, I believe, is that for Wilber, and also for Hegel and Berdyaev, here in our world of subjectivity and illusory separate-self sense, Brahman/Spirit has been

lost to itself and forgotten by us. This is undoubtedly the problem “from below” so to speak. But it is an illusion of the ego, not a truth of the Brahman. Just on the other side of this surface, just above this limitation of Mind, and also just below in Life and Matter, is the Brahman as Supermind. It is an underlying unity, as well as a transcendence to be realized, “which expresses itself openly enough in cosmic action and cosmic substance” or in that world of form and matter which to the ego-mind seems other. The reality, as Wilber mentioned in the beginning, is Wholeness, which always seems to be the point of view and emphasis of Sri Aurobindo when speaking of the involution of that One in all forms of Consciousness. But the point of view of involution and evolution expressed by Wilber always seems to convey the idea of polar opposites and separation from the source. Involution is always only a movement backward and downward, evolution a very halting and painful movement forward and upward.

And if the source is, as he has suggested, the playful spirit of Brahman losing himself in unconsciousness, where does the journey back lead? An answer is given in *The Atman Project*:

Development or evolution is simply the unfolding of these enfolded structures, beginning with the lowest and proceeding to the highest: body to mind to subtle to causal.

We already saw that in evolution each of these structures emerges as a substitute gratification, and is abandoned when it ceases to gratify. And we can see now that each of them emerges as a substitute in evolution because each was created as substitute in involution. The self can climb back up this involved chain of substitutes only by tasting them, finding them lacking, accepting their death, and thus transcending them... a highly evolved being will escape involution altogether: at the first stage of the Clear Light – it will not contract in the face of God nor recoil from the embrace of eternity; and, refusing to create any substitute subjects or substitute objects, it will never again be reborn as a separate self... (p. 174)

The second problem, then, is that for Wilber the embrace of God occurs only in the final return from this difficult process and liberation from the

cycle of involution and evolution, while for Sri Aurobindo the Divine Embrace is the involution and evolution itself, this whole process of enfolding and unfolding is the Self embracing Existence. On either side of the quote taken by Wilber from *The Life Divine* are these sentences, which indicate both its origin and where the process leads, according to Sri Aurobindo:

The transcendent, the Supracosmic is absolute and free in Itself beyond Time and Space and beyond the conceptual opposites of finite and infinite. But in cosmos It uses Its liberty of self-formation, Its Maya, to make a scheme of Itself in the complementary terms of unity and multiplicity; and this multiple unity It establishes in the three conditions of the subconscious, the conscient and the superconscient. ...The liberation of the individual soul is therefore the keynote of the definitive divine action; it is the primary divine necessity and the pivot on which all else turns. It is the point of Light at which the intended complete self-manifestation in the Many begins to emerge. But the liberated soul extends its perception of unity horizontally as well as vertically. Its unity with the transcendent One is incomplete without its unity with the cosmic Many. ...But we can attain to the highest without blotting ourselves out from the cosmic extension. Brahman preserves always its two terms of liberty within and of formation without, of expression and of freedom from the expression. We also, being that, can attain to the same divine self-possession. (p. 39-41)

The third problem is whether, even after co-opting the idea of involution, the Atman-project sufficiently accounts for life as we experience it here in the Ignorance, and answers the Why question. It is certainly true and common to all yoga practice that it is necessary to die to the sense of separateness in order to experience unity. But is the yin/yang dance of Eros/Thanatos and the mechanism of substitute gratification capable of explaining the infinite array of “subjective” impulses, actions, choices, thoughts, decisions that take place at every moment in the life of every human being on earth, as well as the equally boundless permutations of the lithosphere, biosphere, atmosphere, and so on, that form the “objective” context of the evolution of consciousness? And are the seemingly passive pulls of the opposite poles of Contraction and of Atman-telos enough to justify this complex

machinery of existence and keep it in motion? Or, rather, isn't the Atman-project an attempt to explain both human development and the evolution of the cosmos by reducing them to a mechanistic model based upon the fairly traditional Buddhist concepts of karma and rebirth?

In his more recent and central works, such as *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995), and the others that follow from it, *Eye of Spirit* (1997) and *Integral Psychology* (2000), – which seem to me to be much more sophisticated, more philosophical in the true sense of the word, stylistically more interesting, and filled with stimulating and relevant ideas – the Wilber paradigm gets fully developed, along with a more detailed “integral theory of consciousness.” And while he continues to draw significantly upon the thought of Sri Aurobindo, at the same time the contrast between their points of view continues to become clearer and more precise, along with the elements of a possible explanation of the difference. While this will be the focus of my study in Part Two, I will mention here just one example to illustrate the point, and it is a point with which I think Wilber would not disagree. In *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, Wilber takes on the philosophical problem of subjectivity vs. objectivity, drawing extensively on the history of Western epistemology, while attempting a synthesis of Vedanta and Vajrayana. And he ultimately seems to stick to a dualistic model of consciousness and world, form and spirit, even while extolling Nondualism. For example, he says in a note on page 538 in this book of more than 800 pages (*SES*): “My own claim is that the distinction interior/exterior is not an emergent quality, but rather exists from the first moment a boundary is drawn; exists, that is, from the moment of creation. What most panpsychists mean by consciousness or mind is not what I mean by consciousness, which is depth. Because consciousness is depth, it is itself literally unqualifiable. ...When I say that consciousness or depth is unqualifiable, I mean, in a strong sense, to evoke the Mahayana Buddhist notion of *shunyata*, or pure Emptiness, ...pure Emptiness and pure Consciousness are synonymous.”

I believe that this statement is in clear contrast with Sri Aurobindo's

fundamental spiritual and metaphysical position with regard to Consciousness. For example, without going into a complex discussion of the principles of Purusha and Prakriti, I would counterpose a simple argument from *The Life Divine*, admitting of course that it is an oversimplification of an issue that probably cannot be resolved by the mental faculties: "Existence is in its activity a Conscious-Force which presents the workings of its force to its consciousness as forms of its own being. Since force is only the action of one sole-existing Conscious-Being, its results can be nothing else but forms of that Conscious-Being; Substance or Matter, then, is only a form of Spirit" (p. 216).

Part Two – Wilber’s Central Works

Integralism

In *Eye of Spirit*, Wilber fully reiterates the bipolar, ten to twenty level model of involution and evolution, which he calls the "spectrum of consciousness," as formulated in *The Atman Project*. And he now refers to that late seventies-early eighties model as the Tibetan/Aurobindo/Wilber II model, or the Aurobindo/Wilber II model, or sometimes simply the Wilber II model, while explaining the further evolution of the model into Wilber III and Wilber IV, as presented in the books published in the nineties. The basic innovation in Wilber III is the addition of the multiple lines in an individual’s psychological development which proceed through all the levels but may do so at different rates, such as the affective, cognitive, moral, interpersonal, social, intellectual, aesthetic, creative lines of development, etc. He explains this psychological consideration in the new model as follows: "In the same social domain, and in a single transaction, a person can, for example, be at a very high cognitive level of development, while simultaneously being at an extremely low level of moral development, with an unconscious fixation at an even earlier affective stage. ...The Wilber II model fails dramatically in accounting for those facts – because it fails, in general, to distinguish carefully enough between levels and lines, and further to account for

just what is preserved, and what is negated, in evolution (*by which he refers to transitional structures of consciousness such as the archaic, magic, mythic, etc. which are dropped, he believes, as higher formations emerge, while preserving the basic "enduring" structures*)" (p. 213).

The Wilber IV model, which was first elaborated in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (SES)*, makes a quantum conceptual leap from the simple vertical scale of individual consciousness to a four-quadrant model which includes all of the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of human consciousness. Wilber explains this rather remarkable breakthrough in *Eye of Spirit*, as follows:

...consciousness actually exists distributed across all four quadrants with all of their various levels and dimensions. There is no one quadrant (and certainly no one level) to which we can point and say, There is consciousness. Consciousness is in no way localized in that fashion. ...It is true that the Upper Left quadrant is the locus of consciousness as it appears in an individual, but that's the point: as it appears in an individual. Yet consciousness on the whole is anchored in, and distributed across, all of the quadrants – intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social. If you "erase" any quadrant, they all disappear, because each is intrinsically necessary for the existence of the others. (p. 273)

A version of this four-quadrant model of the spectrum of consciousness is reproduced below, and constitutes the developmental paradigm for Wilber's "integral theory of consciousness." If we can imagine a series of five concentric circles, labeled from the smallest to the largest – matter, life, mind, soul, spirit, – and superimpose this image on the four-quadrant graph, at appropriate intervals, then we will see how the "basic enduring structures" of consciousness get further subdivided into the ten to twenty developmental levels most commonly presented in the various Wilber models. On this map, however, the outer, transpersonal rings of soul and spirit would fall outside the box. (The model below is an approximation based on various models.)

(The All-Level, All-Quadrant Paradigm)

Vision-logic		SF3	
Formal	UL-Interior/Individual	UR-Exterior/Individual	SF2
Rules	(Intentional)	(Behavioral)	SF1
Concepts	(Subjective)	(Objective)	Complex neocortex
Symbols			Neocortex
Emotion			Limbic system
Impulse			Reptilian brain
Perception			Neural cord
Sensation			Neuronal organisms
Sensorimotor			Eukaryotes
Irritability			Prokaryotes
Reaction			Molecules
Prehension			Atoms
Physical			Galaxies
Pleromatic			Planets
Protoplasmic			Gaia system
Vegetative			Heterotrophic ecosystems
Locomotive			Societies
Emergent			Division of labor
Uroboric			Groups/families
Typhonic			Clans
Archaic			Tribes
Magic			Tribal village
Mythic			Early state
Rational	LL-Interior/Collective	LR-Exterior/Collective	Nation state
Centauric	(Cultural/Intersubjective)	(Social/Interobjective)	Global system

On other models, several of which appear in the recent publication, *A Theory of Everything* (2001), the soul and spirit circles are included, with the corresponding levels of development in the UL quadrant of integral self, then holistic self; in the LL quadrant integral culture and holistic culture; in the LR quadrant integral commons and holistic meshworks; and in the UR just another level of corresponding physiological organization (SF4, etc.). If we look around the circle from quadrant to quadrant we will see, for example, that Typhonic culture corresponds to the Emotional level of individual development, to the Limbic system, and to pre-tribal Clan society. Similarly, the Rational type of culture corresponds to Formal mind, to the appropriate physical structures, and to the Nation State organization of society. In this diagram, Vision-logic represents the optimal level of general evolution today, with its

corresponding Centauric (individualistic and pluralistic) culture, and a Global (informational) society. In some models, the vital-body ring corresponds roughly to the levels of “pre-modern” individual, cultural and social development; the mental ring corresponds to the “modern” and “post-modern” levels of rational and centauric development, and the soul and spirit rings would include “post-post-modern” developments, as yet hardly conceivable.

This more comprehensive, integral or holistic paradigm makes it possible to interpret every domain of human existence developmentally; it can be used as a tool for evaluating and categorizing systems of interpretation, such as those which reduce knowledge to just one quadrant and thereby exclude other essential aspects of the picture; and it can be used to predict the further development of a particular level of consciousness in any quadrant. For example, this system makes it irrational to expect individuals at the symbolic and archaic levels of development to quickly assimilate the values of a pluralistic, vision-logic community and vice-versa. Certain steps could be prescribed, on the basis of such an analysis, however, to bring about the necessary development, through education, social and economic organization, psychological counseling, spiritual practice, etc., to make their mutual assimilation eventually possible. According to Wilber, in *A Theory of Everything*, the four-quadrant integral development paradigm is being applied in exactly this way by development organizations in the Third World to re-evaluate their short and long term strategies.

I must apologize for this rather crude and over-simplified rendering of the Wilber IV model, and I strongly recommend that anyone who is interested should read *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* and *Eye of Spirit*, in order to appreciate the unfolding of this theory of development and the many interesting avenues of thought that flow from it. For our purposes here, it is especially important to grasp two aspects of the theory, and to examine them in relation to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and Yoga. One aspect is that it purports to be an “integral theory of consciousness.” The other is that it is used to predict a certain direction for the future evolution of human consciousness.

The picture of consciousness that emerges with the integral development paradigm is that of a vast ascending scale of structures comprised of bodies (UR), minds (UL), cultures (LL), and societies (LR), all evolving through the same basic levels of development in the so-called Great Chain of Being. And it is this whole field of interrelated structures and systems that somehow locates, carries, or embodies "consciousness." The higher the developmental level of structural complexity and integrity, the higher the level of consciousness.

Of course, the perennial question remains as to the nature of the two terms of the equation and their relationship: consciousness and the structures or forms that house it: mind and body, subject and object. And Wilber is certainly aware of the problem. One of the primary functions of the four-quadrant paradigm is to show how the methodologies of the sciences tend to address only the right "objective" quadrants and reduce all knowledge to its structures (which Wilber calls the "flatland" of modern rationalist culture). The more "subjective" methodologies of psychology, metaphysics, hermeneutics, aesthetics, on the other hand, tend to occupy themselves with left-quadrant structures to the exclusion of the more easily quantifiable domains on the right. The "integral theory" calls for the mutual recognition and inclusion of all quadrants and aspects of the complex picture of existence as we know it through experience.

In *Integral Psychology* (2000), the mind-body, subject-object enigma is addressed in depth and with particular clarity. I would like to quote Wilber here at some length in order to frame this important issue, as well as to gain the further elucidation of the integral paradigm that he provides in this discussion.

In the chapter titled The 1-2-3 of Consciousness Studies, Wilber writes:

The first major problem that a truly integral (all-level, all-quadrant) approach helps to unravel is what Schopenhauer called "the world-knot," namely, the mind-body problem. (p. 174)

The materialist reduces the mind to the brain, and since the brain is indeed part of the organism, there is no dualism: the mind/body

problem is solved! And that is correct – the brain is part of the organism, part of the physical world, so there is no dualism; nor are there any values, consciousness, depth, or divinity anywhere in the resultant universe. And that reductionism is exactly the “solution” that the physicalist imposes on reality, a solution still rampant in most forms of cognitive science, neuroscience, systems theory, and so on: reduce the Left to the Right and then claim you have solved the problem. ...

But the reason most people, even most scientists, are uneasy with that “solution” – and the reason the problem remains a problem – is that, even though materialism announces that there is no dualism, most people know otherwise, because they feel the difference between their mind and their body (between their thoughts and their feelings) – they feel it every time they consciously decide to move their arm, they feel it in every exercise of will – and they also feel the difference between their mind and their Body (or between the subject in here and the objective world out there). ...

There is a distinction between mind (formop) and felt body (vital and sensorimotor), and this can be experienced in the interior or Left-Hand domains. It is not a dualism, but is rather a case of “transcend and include,” and almost every rational adult has a sense of the transcend part, in that the mind can, on a good day, control the body and its desires. All of that is phenomenologically true for the Left-Hand domains. But none of those interior stages of qualitative development (from body to mind to soul to spirit) are captured when “body” means Right-Hand organism and “mind” means Right-Hand brain – all of those qualitative distinctions are completely lost in material monism, which does not solve the problem but obliterates it.

The dualist, on the other hand, acknowledges as real both consciousness and matter, but generally despairs of finding any way to relate them. “Mind” in the general sense of “interiors” and “Body” in the general sense of “exteriors” seem to be separated by an unbridgeable gulf – a dualism between subject and object. And at the level of formal operational thinking (or reason in general), at which the discussion usually takes place, the dualists are right: inside and outside are a very real dualism, and attempts to deny that dualism can almost always be shown to be facile, a semantic sleight-of-hand that verbally claims that subject and object are one, but which still leaves the self looking at the

world out there which seems as separate as ever.

This is where the transrational stages of development have so much to offer this discussion. In the disclosure known as satori, for example, it becomes clear that the subject and object are two sides of the same thing, that inside and outside are two aspects of One Taste. How to relate them is not the problem, according to the clear consensus of the many individuals who have tapped into this wave of development. The problem, rather, is that this genuinely nondual solution is not something that can be fully grasped at the rational level. ...

Those who develop to the nondual stages of consciousness unfolding are virtually unanimous: consciousness and matter, interior and exterior, self and world, are of One Taste. Subject and object are both distinct realities and aspects of the same thing: a true unity-in-diversity. But that unity-in-diversity cannot be stated in rational terms in a way that makes sense to anybody who has not also had a transrational experience. Therefore, the proof for this nondual solution can only be found in the further development of the consciousness of those who seek to know the solution. (p. 180-181)

...But how do we proceed to unsnarl the world-knot if we have not yet reached these higher stages ourselves, and if we cannot expect that others will have done so? We can at least begin, I suggest, by acknowledging and incorporating the realities of all four quadrants. That is, if we cannot yet ourselves – in our own consciousness development – be “all-level” (matter to body to mind to soul to spirit), let us at least attempt to be “all-quadrant”...

It is not enough to say that organism and environment coevolve; it is not enough to say that culture and consciousness coevolve. All four of those “tetra-evolve” together.

That is, the objective organism (the Upper-Right quadrant), with its DNA, its neuronal pathways, its brain systems, and its behavioral patterns, mutually interacts with the objective environment, ecosystems, and social realities (the Lower Right), and all of those do indeed coevolve. Likewise, individual consciousness (Upper Left), with its intentionality, structures, and states, arises within, and mutually interacts with, the intersubjective culture (Lower Left) in which it finds itself, and which it in turn helps to create, so that these, too, coevolve.

But just as important, subjective intentionality and objective behavior mutually interact (e.g., through will and response), and cultural worldviews mutually interact with social structures, as does individual consciousness and behavior. In other words, all four quadrants – organism, environment, consciousness, and culture – cause and are caused by the others: they “tetra-evolve.” ...

As we have seen, the subjective features of consciousness (waves, streams, states) are intimately interrelated with the objective aspects of the organism (especially the brain, neurophysiology, and various organ systems in the individual), with the background cultural contexts that allow meaning and understanding to be generated in the first place, and with the social institutions that anchor them. ...

Accordingly, in writings such as “An Integral Theory of Consciousness,” I have stressed the need for an approach to consciousness that differentiates-and-integrates all four quadrants (or simply the Big Three of I, we, and it; or first-person, second-person, and third-person accounts: the 1-2-3 of consciousness studies). (p. 183-184)

This seems to be the theory in a nutshell, and there are a few quick observations that I would like to make before putting it into a more critical perspective. “Consciousness” is frequently associated with subjective states throughout Wilber’s discussion, and is placed in the context of, or in relationship to, objective states – physical, cultural, and social. Consciousness consistently has the connotation of “perception,” “awareness,” “cognition,” “intention,” (and we might as well add the more traditional terms judgment, imagination, ratiocination) in short, the functions usually associated with Mind. Although it is clear that these functions coexist with, and are mutually determined by interactions with, culture, society, and the material body, they remain distinct, (as he says above, “distinct aspects of the same thing”) and therefore the problem with which the discussion began seems to have been merely restated rather than solved.

The modern and post-modern philosophies of idealism and phenomenology have handled the problem in much the same way. Wilber has not moved far, if at all, from the widely held philosophical views of both East and West that consciousness and matter, mind and

body are simply two aspects of the same thing. Both are necessary to existence as we know it and to any reasonably complete description of that existence: nothing is, in any absolute sense, exclusively either subjective or objective. The four-quadrant paradigm is, therefore, a reasonably accurate way of understanding and depicting such a manifold world. Moreover, it suggests, and supports with compelling evidence, that it is an evolving world that it describes, with clearly defined stages of development and the possibility of yet higher levels of the interaction of matter and spirit to be realized.

How then does this form of *integralism* compare with that of Sri Aurobindo? Is the problem of consciousness/matter, mind/body dualism handled in any significantly different way by Sri Aurobindo? And does the higher, transrational, nondual level of consciousness defined and predicted by Wilber differ appreciably from Sri Aurobindo's conception of the spiritual consciousness to be realized in the next stages of evolution?

The answer to each of these questions will depend, in fact, upon what we might call the metaphysics of consciousness, which is of course the subject of *The Life Divine*. In that treatise, Sri Aurobindo demonstrates with a variety of arguments based on intuition, reason, and Vedanta, that Existence is Consciousness, Consciousness is Energy, and the so-called Great Chain of Being, at every level – matter, life, mind, soul, spirit – is an expression of Conscious Being. In a particularly compact and luminous formulation of this concept of Reality and its process, he writes:

Existence is in its activity a Conscious-Force which presents the workings of its force to its consciousness as forms of its own being. Since Force is only the action of one sole-existing Conscious-Being, its results can be nothing else but forms of that Conscious-Being; Substance or Matter, then, is only a form of Spirit. The appearance which this form of Spirit assumes to our senses is due to that dividing action of Mind from which we have been able to deduce consistently the whole phenomenon of the universe. We know now that Life is an action of Conscious-Force of which material forms are the result; Life

involved in those forms, appearing in them first as inconscient force, evolves and brings back into manifestation as Mind the consciousness which is the real self of the force and which never ceases to exist in it even when unmanifest. We know also that Mind is an inferior power of the original conscious Knowledge or Supermind, a power to which Life acts as an instrumental energy; for, descending through Supermind, Consciousness or Chit represents itself as Mind, Force of consciousness or Tapas represents itself as Life. Mind, by its separation from its own higher reality in Supermind, gives Life the appearance of division and, by its farther involution in its own Life-Force, becomes subconscious in Life and thus gives the outward appearance of an inconscient force to its material workings. Therefore, the inconscience, the inertia, the atomic disaggregation of Matter must have their source in this all-dividing and self-involving action of Mind by which our universe came into being. As Mind is only a final action of Supermind in the descent towards creation and Life an action of Conscious-Force (Chit-tapas) working in the conditions of the Ignorance created by this descent of Mind, so Matter, as we know it, is only the final form taken by conscious-being as the result of that working. Matter is substance of the one conscious-being phenomenally divided within itself by the action of universal Mind, – a division which the individual mind repeats and dwells in, but which does not abrogate or at all diminish the unity of Spirit or the unity of Energy or the real unity of Matter. (LD, 1949, p. 216-217)

In this concept, subjectivity and objectivity are merely two aspects of consciousness, through which being knows itself; and Mind is the principle of this illusion of separateness and division, not only the cause of limiting and dividing knowledge in evolving minds, but the mediating principle for the descent of Spirit into substantial form.

If we go back to the spiritual basis of things, substance in its utter purity resolves itself into pure conscious being, self-existent, inherently self-aware by identity, but not yet turning its consciousness upon itself as object. Supermind preserves this self-awareness by identity as its substance of self-knowledge and its light of self-creation, but for that creation presents Being to itself as the subject-object one and multiple of its own active consciousness. Being as object is held there in a supreme knowledge which can, by comprehension, see it both as an

object of cognition within itself and subjectively as itself, but can also and simultaneously, by apprehension, project it as an object (or objects) of cognition within the circumference of its consciousness, not other than itself, part of its being, but a part (or parts) put away from itself, – that is to say, from the center of vision in which Being concentrates itself as the Knower, Witness or Purusha. We have seen that from this apprehending consciousness arises the movement of Mind, the movement by which the individual knower regards a form of his own universal being as if other than he; but in the divine Mind there is immediately or rather simultaneously another movement or reverse side of the same movement, an act of union in being which heals this phenomenal division and prevents it from becoming even for a moment solely real to the knower. This act of conscious union is that which is represented otherwise in dividing Mind obtusely, ignorantly, quite externally as contact in consciousness between divided beings and separate objects, and with us this contact in divided consciousness is primarily represented by the principle of sense. On this basis of sense, on this contact of union subject to division, the action of the thought-mind finds itself and prepares for the return to a higher principle of union in which division is made subject to unity and subordinate. Substance, then, as we know it, material substance, is the form in which Mind acting through sense contacts the conscious Being of which it is itself a movement of knowledge. ...But Mind by its very nature tends to know and sense substance of conscious-being, not in its unity or totality but by the principle of division. (LD, 1949, p. 218-219)

In one of the later chapters of *The Life Divine*, titled Reality and the Integral Knowledge, Sri Aurobindo makes explicit what his form of “integralism” means, makes clear the point of view which justifies the philosopher Haridas Chaudhuri labeling this philosophy “integral non-dualism,” and outlines the project of his Yoga Philosophy to heal the division, not only of Mind but of Existence, through a return to and a descent of Supermind.

This then is the origin, this the nature, these the boundaries of the Ignorance. Its origin is a limitation of knowledge; its distinctive character a separation of the being from its own integrality and entire reality; its boundaries are determined by this separative development of the consciousness, for it shuts us to our true self and to the true self

and whole nature of things and obliges us to live in an apparent surface existence. A return or a progress to integrality, a disappearance of the limitation, a breaking down of separativeness, an overpassing of boundaries, a recovery of our essential and whole reality must be the sign and opposite character of the inner turn towards Knowledge. There must be a replacement of a limited and separative by an essential and integral consciousness identified with the original truth and the whole truth of self and existence. The integral Knowledge is something that is already there in the integral Reality: it is not a new or still non-existent thing that has to be created, acquired, learned, invented, or built up by the mind; it must rather be discovered or uncovered, it is a Truth that is self-revealed to a spiritual endeavor: for it is there veiled in our deeper and greater self; it is the very stuff of our own spiritual consciousness, and it is by awaking to it even in our surface self that we have to possess it. There is an integral self-knowledge that we have to recover and, because the world-self also is our self, an integral world-knowledge. A knowledge that can be learned or constructed by the mind exists and has its value, but that is not what is meant when we speak of the Knowledge. ...An integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole. ...An integral knowledge presupposes an integral Reality; for it is the power of a Truth-consciousness which is itself the consciousness of the Reality. (LD, 1949, p. 565-566)

If we view the four-quadrant, all-level, paradigm of development in the context of this conception of a vast integral Reality of Conscious-Being, we have to conclude that the "Integral Theory of Consciousness" is at least not the same as a theory of *integral consciousness*. In fact, the reduction of the cosmos to a four quadrant developmental model may very well be a valid aid to the mind in coming to terms with the problems of psychological development and the evolution of human consciousness. But it seems obvious that such a map of the territory does not lead necessarily to what Sri Aurobindo describes as an integral consciousness, and to what Wilber identifies as a second-tier or transpersonal consciousness. An integral consciousness might be able to understand or represent the world in terms of such a map, but the map doesn't even indicate the possibility of such an integral consciousness.

And it appears that Wilber would probably agree with this observation. In *Eye of Spirit*, the book in which he perhaps reaches his highest levels of thought and insight, he writes:

Integral philosophy itself is of the mental domain, and cannot by itself, with its mental devices alone, step beyond that sphere. But it firmly acknowledges the role of contemplation in generating data, and it takes that data into account in its own coordinating and elucidating activities. If it does not itself deliver meditative data, it firmly acknowledges the existence of that data. It is mandalic reason at its finest and most encompassing. ...Integral philosophy thus mentally coordinates the Good, and the True, and the Beautiful, weaving a mandala of the many faces of Spirit, and then invites us to take up spiritual practice itself, and thus finally meet spirit face to face. (p. 94-95)

It is in this book, too, where Wilber ventures farther than elsewhere into the realm of spiritual practice and contemplation, and reveals through a number of inspired passages something of the second-tier experience of transpersonal reality as he envisions it. And though still not attempting a metaphysics of this reality, he gives enough information for us to be able to establish a contextual perspective. He writes:

...the ultimate reality is not something seen, but rather the everpresent seer. Things that are seen come and go, are happy or sad, pleasant or painful – but the Seer is none of these things, and it does not come and go. The Witness does not waiver, does not wobble, does not enter that stream of time. The Witness is not an object, not a thing seen, but the everpresent seer of all things, the simple Witness that is the I of Spirit, the center of the cyclone, the opening that is God, the clearing that is pure emptiness.

There is never a time that you do not have access to this Witnessing awareness. At every single moment, there is a spontaneous awareness of whatever happens to be present – and that simple, spontaneous, effortless awareness is ever-present Spirit itself. Even if you think you don't see it, that very awareness is it. And thus, the ultimate state of consciousness – intrinsic Spirit itself – is not hard to reach but impossible to avoid. ...

Thus, as you rest in the Witness, you won't see anything in

particular. The true seer is nothing that can be seen, so you simply begin by disidentifying with any and all objects.

I am aware of sensations in my body; those are objects, I am not those. I am aware of thoughts in my mind; those are objects, I am not those. I am aware of my self in this moment, but that is just another object, and I am not that.

Sights float by in nature, thoughts float by in the mind, feelings float by in the body, and I am none of those, I am not an object. I am the pure Witness of all those objects. I am Consciousness as such. ...

And so we rest in this state of the pure and simple Witness, the true seer, which is vast Emptiness and pure Freedom, and we allow whatever is seen to arise as it wishes. Spirit is in the Free and Empty Seer, not in the limited, bound, mortal, and finite objects that parade by in the world of time. And so we rest in this vast Emptiness and Freedom, in which all things arise. (p. 288-290)

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the ultimate nature of Mind is emptiness. Consciousness, conscious of itself, the Witnessing Purusha of the Sankhya philosophy – the *akashara purusha* – is the Self, Atman, and the realization of this ultimate reality is liberation. It is apparent from this clear description of the meditation practice suggested by Wilber, that for him too, this is the ultimate reality, the realization of the true nature of Self and Spirit. But if ultimate reality is Emptiness, then what is the status of all of those subjects and objects in the other three quadrants and in all the lower levels of development that are mapped by the integral theory of consciousness? If consciousness is emptiness, then is all the rest of the map ultimately illusion? Does this form of “nondualism” simply negate the form and substance of everything that arises within its purview, or absorb it into its emptiness? And if so, then how does this point of view account for the continued arising of form and its circumstantial, physical, vital and mental conditioning of the witness by its objective appearances?

These are of course the questions that are raised by this traditional interpretation of spiritual truth when it is challenged, as it has been as a secondary theme throughout *The Life Divine* by Sri Aurobindo, and also

by the philosophy of the Gita. It is the classical question of the nature and relationship of Purusha and Prakriti, and it seems inevitable that it be raised very seriously in any attempt to reconcile Vedanta and Vajrayana. In an early chapter of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says, "... the first thing we have to ask ourselves is whether that force (*matter, energy, motion, "the Becoming"*) is simply force, simply an unintelligent energy of movement or whether consciousness which seems to emerge out of it in this material world we live in, is not merely one of its phenomenal results but rather its own true and secret nature. In Vedantic terms, is Force simply Prakriti, only a movement of action and process, or is Prakriti really power of Chit, in its nature force of creative self-conscience? On this essential problem all the rest hinges." [My emphasis] (p. 75). And not only does a complete metaphysical theory of consciousness hinge on the question; it is also essential to a thorough psychology of development and to a spiritual practice that seeks the higher evolution of consciousness. If it is not answered, then the problem is not really solved and we are left with what Wilber referred to earlier as "a semantic sleight-of-hand."

The place where Ken Wilber comes closest to a systematic treatment of the issue is in his philosophy of "interiors" and "exteriors," which I mentioned briefly at the end of Part One. Since this is indeed the question on which all the rest hinges, let us look closely at the argument presented in Chapter Four of *SES*. There he says:

Spinoza, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Whitehead, Aurobindo, Schelling, and Radhakrishnan are just a few of the major theorists who have explicitly recognized that the within of things, the interiority of individual holons, is in essence the same as consciousness, though of course they use different names with slightly different meanings.

I will not, at this point, get involved in the philosophical nuances of those various positions, which are inextricably bound up with the problems of pansychism and historical solutions to the mind-body problem...Rather, I will, for the time being, take a more generalized position and simply say that, for me, the within of things is consciousness, the without of things is form.

Or, as we put it earlier, the within of things is depth, the without is surface. But all surfaces are surfaces of depth, which means, all forms are forms of consciousness.

Further, I don't want to haggle over whether the very lowest holons are totally or only mostly devoid of rudimentary forms of consciousness, or prehension. First, there is no lower limit to holons, so there is no rock bottom to serve as a standard. Second, they are all forms of depth, so the actual amount of consciousness in them is a completely relative affair. Thus, whatever we take at present as the lowest or most primitive holons (quarks, for example), I will simply say that they have the least depth, the least consciousness, relatively speaking, and I will, with Whitehead, call that form "prehension." You are free to call the lowest levels "totally inert" if you wish, and pick up the argument from there.

Let me emphasize that it really does not matter, as far as I am concerned, how far down (or not) you wish to push consciousness. Whitehead, as we said, saw prehension as the irreducible "atom" of existence. Mahayana Buddhism maintains that literally all sentient beings possess Buddha Mind, and liberation involves a realization of that all-pervading consciousness. Lynn Margulis, the noted biologist, believes that cells possess consciousness. A handful of scientists think that plants show protosensation. Animal rights activists insist that most animal forms show rudimentary feelings. And I suppose most orthodox theorists don't really see consciousness emerging until primates and usually humans.

...But my main point is not where precisely to draw the line – draw it wherever you feel comfortable – but that the line itself involves preeminently the distinction between interiority and exteriority. (p. 111-112)

The theory of interiors and exteriors is graphically represented by the four-quadrant paradigm which shows that the levels of the left quadrants are the interiors of the corresponding levels of the right quadrants. The interiors are the shared feelings, meanings, values expressed by or perceived within the exterior forms. Consciousness increases with the complexity of forms up the ascending scale of development until it experiences itself at the uppermost, transpersonal

level and is liberated. What drives this progressive emergence of consciousness in the evolving structures and processes is apparently the Atman-project. How the “interiors” and “exteriors” are related, and how they mutually interact is not explained, nor is the fundamental two-fold nature of existence, nor how the process of unfolding is maintained after the consciousness is liberated. The theory of interiors and exteriors is a “metaphor” of conscious existence, rather than an explanation. And it appears that the material or mechanical force of Prakriti, on the structural side of the equation, carries the soul or Purusha along in its progressive unfolding until, at the top levels of physical, social, and cultural evolution, it is liberated and has no further need of or attachment to the exteriors. And, therefore, it is impossible to predict what forms these exteriors will take in the future evolution of a second-tier, integral culture. This is the fundamental problem with such a theory of consciousness with respect to the prospects of a higher evolution of life on earth; it is a problem that Sri Aurobindo has repeatedly identified with both Buddhism and Sankhya philosophies.

Wilber reveals this paradox in a note on psychic and spiritual consciousness in *SES*:

Pure subtle level mysticism thus has few actual referents in the gross (natural) world. ...Causal-level mysticism...has no gross or subtle referents; it has no referents at all, except its own self-existing emptiness. And nondual mysticism is the identity of Emptiness and all form, so its referents are whatever is arising at the moment... ...The psychic is on the border between the gross and subtle states. As such, not only is it the home of all sorts of various preliminary and initial mystical phenomena..., it is itself the broad transition state from gross to subtle. (p. 608-609)

This conclusion regarding the nature of spiritual development is perhaps the reason why Wilber’s fundamental paradigm of development tops out at the vision-logic level. It seems that after touching the low subtle or psychic plane he drops back to a mental plane and translates, to use the Atman-project terminology, his own urge to higher development into the only level of consciousness and form that still appears to him to

have a sufficient engagement with the substance of experience to make a difference. Therefore, he says:

It is the integrative power of vision-logic, I believe, and not the indissociation of tribal magic or the imperialism of mythic involvement that is desperately needed on a global scale. For it is vision-logic with its centauric/planetary worldview that, in my opinion, holds the only hope for the integration of the biosphere and noosphere, the supranational organization of planetary consciousness, the genuine recognition of ecological balance, the unrestrained and unforced forms of global discourse, the nondominating and noncoercive forms of federated states, the unrestrained flow of worldwide communicative exchange, the production of genuine world citizens, and the enculturation of female agency (ie., the integration of male and female in both the noosphere and the biosphere) – all of which, in my opinion, is nevertheless simply the platform for the truly interesting forms of higher and transpersonal states of consciousness lying yet in our collective future – if there is one. (SES, p. 187)

...Centaur/vision logic – the languages of depth and development ... tend to be dialectical, dialogical, network oriented, developmental (evolutionary in the broadest sense) – in short, the languages of depth and development. As I indicated, this volume is intentionally written in these languages. (p. 622)

It is at this point that the sharp contrast becomes most evident between what might be called the weak or intermediate form of integral nondualism put forward by Wilber, and the much stronger and more radical form of integral nondualism of Sri Aurobindo. For the latter, only the highest spiritual evolution of consciousness can bring about a substantial, lasting and integral transformation of the life of humanity on earth. And such an evolution is possible because that highest divine Supermind is also the basis of existence, the resolution of the Purusha/Prakriti enigma, and can not only be reached through the process of a spiritual ascent of consciousness, but also can then descend through a higher spiritualized mind into life and matter to transform every aspect of existence.

It is evident that Wilber has not accepted this principle or integrated it

into his theory of the evolution of consciousness and, therefore, that the theory remains inadequate with respect to both the metaphysics of Conscious-Being and the possibility of a further, supramental evolution of that consciousness on earth as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo's point of view, which appears always to be looking from Supermind down the ladder of involution, rather than up from a position of higher psychic or spiritualized mind, sees the position defined by Wilber as a valid standpoint within the emergent framework of our evolving mentality. For example, he says:

A line divides Supermind and Overmind which permits a free transmission, allows the lower Power to derive from the higher Power all it holds or sees, but automatically compels a transitional change in the passage. The integrality of the Supermind keeps always the essential truth of things, the total truth and the truth of its individual self-determinations clearly knit together; it maintains in them an inseparable unity and between them a close interpenetration and a free and full consciousness of each other: but in Overmind this integrality is no longer there. ...Purusha and Prakriti, Conscious Soul and executive Force of Nature, are in the supramental harmony a two-aspected single truth, being and dynamis of Reality; there can be no disequilibrium or predominance of one over the other. In Overmind we have the origin of the cleavage, the trenchant distinction made by the philosophy of the Sankhyas in which they appear as two independent entities, Prakriti able to dominate Purusha and cloud its freedom and power, reducing it to a witness and recipient of her forms and actions, Purusha able to return to its separate existence and abide in a free self-sovereignty by rejection of her original overclouding material principle. ... Our human mental consciousness sees the world in sections cut by the reason and sense and put together in a formation which is also sectional; the house it builds is planned to accommodate one or another generalized formulation of Truth, but excludes the rest or admits some only as guests or dependents in the house. Overmind Consciousness is global in its cognition and can hold any number of seemingly fundamental differences together in a reconciling vision. ...What to the mental reason are irreconcilable differences present themselves to the Overmind intelligence as coexistent correlatives; what to the mental reason are contraries are to the Overmind intelligence complementaries.

...The Overmind is a principle of cosmic Truth and a vast and endless catholicity is its very spirit; its energy is an all-dynamism as well as a principle of separate dynamisms; it is a sort of inferior Supermind, – although it is concerned predominantly not with absolutes, but with what might be called the dynamic potentials or pragmatic truths of Reality, or with absolutes mainly for their power of generating pragmatic or creative values, although, too, its comprehension of things is more global than integral, since its totality is built up of global wholes or constituted by separate independent realities uniting or coalescing together, and although the essential unity is grasped by it and felt to be basic of things and pervasive in their manifestation, but no longer as in the Supermind their intimate and ever-present secret, their dominating continent, the overt constant builder of the harmonic whole of their activity and nature. (LD, 1949, p. 256-259)

It would seem that Wilber has a clear intuition of this higher plane of reality, which in Sri Aurobindo's psychology is to be found above a highest intuitive mind, and that it would be possible for Wilber's subtle psychic and vision-logic inspiration to pass upward into the Higher Mind and Overmind planes easily and naturally. It also appears that his theory of psychological development is borne out to a considerable extent by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as exemplars of superconscious evolution, the premise with which the Atman Project began. But, let us note, Sri Aurobindo is as yet the only spiritual visionary to have outlined in detail the nature of a divine consciousness, life, and society to be realized as the result of the descent of the Supermind, and to have developed a Yoga for hastening that descent. The Mother is as yet the only Yogi to have deliberately facilitated that descent and transformation, and focused its creative energy on the establishment of a secular township based on the philosophy of spiritual transformation and its promise of the evolution of a new species. It is not unlikely that Ken Wilber, in his pursuit of the integral spiritual vision, will at some point access the higher planes of consciousness of which he is already vaguely aware, and that his concern for humanity as a whole, in all its many levels and modes of expression, will translate into pragmatic applications to further the general project of human evolution. We may look forward with positive anticipation for signs of that development in the "later works,"

some of which have already been announced. As yet, however, it is to Sri Aurobindo that we must turn for a definite indication of both the process and the likely outcome of this highest and noblest human endeavor:

When there is a complete silence in the being, either a stillness of the whole being or a stillness behind unaffected by surface movements, then we can become aware of a Self, a spiritual substance of our being, an existence exceeding even the soul individuality, spreading itself into universality, surpassing all dependence on any natural form or action, extending itself upward into a transcendence of which the limits are not visible. It is these liberations of the spiritual part in us which are the decisive steps of the spiritual evolution in Nature. ...or the nature may obey the psychic entity's intimations, move in an inner light, follow an inner guidance. This is already a considerable evolution and amounts to a beginning at least of a psychic and spiritual transformation. But it is possible to go farther; for the spiritual being, once inwardly liberated, can develop in mind the higher states of being that are its own natural atmosphere and bring down a supramental energy and action which are proper to the Truth-consciousness; the ordinary mental instrumentation, life instrumentation, physical instrumentation even, could then be entirely transformed and become parts no longer of an ignorance however much illumined, but of a supramental creation which would be the true action of a spiritual truth-consciousness and knowledge. (LD, 761-762)

Conclusion

Wilber is right when he says that the ultimate resolution of the mind-body problem, and the ultimate understanding of spiritual nondualism, can only be achieved by a higher than rational, contemplative thought. But there are different levels of transrational and transpersonal consciousness, which result in different conceptions of nondualism. The conceptions of the Vedanta and of Vajrayana are important examples of such differing views. Textual comparisons such as those undertaken here indicate the need for further research into these transpersonal realms of experience, and into the traditions that have systematically

developed such knowledge. It appears that the work of Ken Wilber and of Sri Aurobindo diverges along fairly traditional lines of psychological and spiritual development: the one ending in “liberation” and the other in “transformation.” This is a distinction that has been emphasized throughout his writings by Sri Aurobindo and constitutes the most prominent contrast between his and Wilber’s work.

Intrinsic to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of the Brahman, with Supermind as the Conscious Force of the Brahman, and therefore both the creative energy and the immortal self of all creation, is the principle of involution. But in this view, involution entails the descent of infinite and eternal principles – Supermind, Overmind, Mind, Life, Matter. These are therefore eternally self-existent planes of Divine Being, not only involved in the evolving universe as potential, but, more importantly, as the overseeing and underlying universal support of the evolving planes, pressing down upon them from above to bring forth their evolving forms in Time and Space. Without these essential, universal divinities, so fundamental to the Vedic knowledge, how could the infinite diversity and integrality of the forms of life and mind have emerged? And how could the embodied soul become cosmically conscious of universal life and mind and of the eternal forms of Truth, Beauty, and the Good, and the Godheads of the Overmind – Divine Love, Power, Joy, without entering into such ideal, divine planes? Even Plato would consider these Ideal Forms self-existent and therefore irreducible to a quadrant or to any or all of the particular forms of temporal unfolding. Without these principles, how would a psychic transformation of consciousness be possible, by which we might look out over the commons and witness, not merely a myriad of sensorimotor instruments performing rational-scientific operations in order to manifest substitute gratifications, nor an essential emptiness of being in the soul, but divine force embodying, however imperfectly, through minds, lives, and bodies the vibrations of an all-creative divine love and light? And yet, the Atman-project does not take this principle of descent into account, and therefore relies upon a linear, bipolar, and mechanical process of expansion and contraction to bring forth the infinite diversity of being in space and time. This is the

second major contrast that we find when comparing the theories of involution and evolution of Ken Wilber and Sri Aurobindo.

The third important contrast in the critical perspective that a textual comparison of the works of these authors provides is found in the form of thought and language that each uses to express his vision. Wilber's is, as he points out, dialogical, analytical, and contemplative, and aims at a psychological interpretation of existence from a synthesizing mental perspective. Sri Aurobindo's is metaphysical and supramental, and attempts the spiritual interpretation of existence, on the basis of thought and language that originate on a spiritual plane of consciousness beyond mind. As he says in a chapter of *The Life Divine*, "...the intellect must consent to pass out of the bounds of a finite logic and accustom itself to the logic of the Infinite. On this condition alone, by this way of seeing and thinking, it ceases to be paradoxical or futile to speak of the ineffable: but if we insist on applying a finite logic to the Infinite, the omnipresent reality will escape us and we shall grasp instead an abstract shadow, a dead form petrified into speech or a hard incisive graph which speaks of the Reality but does not express it. Our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known..."(p.293). This characterization is especially true of the language of *Savitri*, but it is also evident in many passages of *The Life Divine* which have the clear intention to express the vast and integral truth of the Brahman.

Whitehead, Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo

An Introduction to a Treatise on the Development of Philosophy

1. Historical foundations of a comparative study of philosophy in the Twentieth Century

The most common, basic and essential questions raised by philosophy concern knowledge of the nature of being, of the nature of knowing, and of the nature of ourselves as humans in relation to each other and the world. It has also been common, traditionally, to consider the nature of God in the context of these questions, perhaps because of our common mythical past, perhaps because of the urgency we feel for an absolute that escapes us, and perhaps because of an inevitability, in the nature of our being and knowing, of an affirmation of God as the ultimate object of both.

The answers arrived at to these perennial questions have been stated and restated throughout the history of philosophical thought. The most prominent periods of such restatement and reformulation, in Western civilization, were the Classical Greek Period in Athens, the Medieval Period in the cathedral schools of Europe, the Modern Period in Europe, and the Post-modern Global Period of the Twentieth Century. During the most recent period, it was possible to complete the Modernist project of rethinking the traditional foundations of philosophy, from a rational and scientific point of view, and also to re-synthesize the various schools of Eastern Philosophy that have influenced Western Philosophy to some extent at each period, in the light of the new Global Village world-view.

It is important to note, I think, that because of the extraordinary advances in science and technology during the past hundred years, the synthesis of philosophical thought that was possible in the Twentieth Century included all of the various schools of philosophy and science that have developed in every epoch and culture of the world, and each

was synthesized simultaneously with the new discoveries in physics and biology that now characterize our common point of view as members of one global civilization, afloat on spaceship Earth in an evolving quantum universe. The revolution in outlook and self-understanding that took place during this period meant that the point of view of philosophy could no longer be the same as it was in any previous period. And yet, at the same time, its revision of the traditional schools gave the new scientific-metaphysical philosophy a depth and completeness that had never before been possible.

The philosophers whose work I have chosen to examine and compare, in order to illustrate the completion and synthesis of philosophical thought that I believe to have been achieved, are A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950). Each of these thinkers was fully aware of the facts and implications of the Freudian/Darwinian/Einsteinian revolutions, and at the same time fully conversant with the knowledge of each of the previous epochs in the development of human civilization. I shall attempt to show not only how each of these thinkers contributed in an original and exemplary way to the completion and synthesis of philosophical thought, but also how each moved beyond the traditions in which his thought is rooted, towards a new paradigm of self-understanding, knowledge, and conscious engagement with the world that has the potential to transform life itself into new forms and powers of freedom and truth in the future.

Philosophers themselves have spoken of their life's passion as having just such a potential to transform life into something closer to the ideals that the mind can conceive. And it is perhaps because of this sense of hope which philosophy generates, and the persistence and thoroughness with which its practitioners adhere to it, that we are drawn to read and contemplate the works of such minds. There may be a natural resonance with such a process of thought, that generates a sense of the enhancement of the meaning and purpose of life itself, in the minds of those who pursue it, contact it, or are inspired by it, from generation to generation. From this we may gather renewed strength to

continue the pursuit, and new energy to create a more perfect future.

If this is so, then philosophy, like life, is a self-sustaining, self-perpetuating process, and there would be reason to believe that civilization has drawn energy and inspiration from it throughout the ages. I personally believe that this is so, and that this is the reason I have been drawn to the works of these thinkers and writers who, for me, are among the most exemplary practitioners of this pursuit. By listening to them and entering into their dialogue, I believe that we will become more active and effective participants in the ongoing process of civilization and self-perfection.

That this is the true potential and real task of philosophical thought must be asserted, as a fundamental belief of each of these three contemporary philosophers. This was the theme of A. N. Whitehead's book, *Adventures of Ideas* (1933). In it he attempted to demonstrate through historical argument how the process works. For example: "Christianity rapidly assimilated the Platonic doctrine of the human soul. The philosophy and the religion were very congenial to each other in their respective teachings; although, as was natural, the religious version was much more specialized than the philosophic version. We have here an example of the principle that dominates the history of ideas. There will be a general idea in the background flittingly, waveringly, realized by the few in its full generality – or perhaps never expressed in any adequate universal form with persuasive force. Such persuasive expression depends on the accidents of genius: for example it depends on the chance that a man like Plato appears. But this general idea, whether expressed or implicitly just below the surface of consciousness, embodies itself in special expression after special expression.... It is a hidden driving force, haunting humanity, and ever appearing in specialized guise as compulsory on action by reason of its appeal to the uneasy conscience of the age" (p.16).

We need make only a cursory review of history to verify the impact of Plato's ideas of the Soul, the Ideal State, and the Good, as they were further developed by Aristotle in his *Politics*, *Ethics*, *Physics*, and

Metaphysics, then incorporated into and brought forward by early Christianity, to be powerfully reborn in the cathedral schools of the Twelfth-Fifteenth Centuries where they determined the religious, social, political and scientific views of Modern Europe, to manifest more powerfully than ever in the Eighteenth Century overthrow of traditional monarchies, and in the Twentieth Century overthrow of Totalitarianism and Empire. The same ideas are the foundation of the common religious, social, scientific, and philosophical systems and values by which we live today. And yet, the conditions of our civilization are far removed from those in which these ideas were incubated two millennia ago. Our understanding, interpretation, and application of them will also be necessarily far removed from their original formulations, perhaps to the point of them being unrecognizable or lost to our awareness. Whitehead, Heidegger, and Sri Aurobindo may therefore be assumed for our purposes to be the Platos of the new age that is upon us, through whose lens we may rediscover these seminal ideas in a way that can ground us firmly in our present reality and propel us forward toward the ideal type of civilization that is yet striving to be realized by us.

It shall be our goal, in the course of this examination of the development of philosophy, to demonstrate the reality and importance of this task, to the satisfaction, we may even hope, not only of ourselves but also of the undergraduate student who, for example, believes that philosophy courses, like so much else in the syllabus, are simply useless; and to the graduate student whose early course in philosophy may have failed to be deeply meaningful, leaving the future free for the unhampered and thoughtless pursuit of monetary success. For in this age of super-technology and the culture syndrome of immediate gratification-perpetual boredom, the explicit distinction made by Sri Aurobindo, for example, between the intellectual versus the practical man, the idealistic versus the mundane, is even more in need of reiteration and emphasis today than when he made it the theme of a popular essay, early in his writing career. At that time, he was bridging the Victorian Industrial and the Scientific Technological ages, when human values were in upheaval and transition. We are there again, and it is as likely as ever that these

basic distinctions of philosophical understanding will be lost to the bright young technocrats, technicians, and global entrepreneurs of today, on whose judgment much of what happens to us in the future may depend.

In *Ideals and Progress* (1922), Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Ideals are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfill themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation. To the pragmatist intellect which takes its stand upon the ever-changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities, they are at most potentialities of future truth and only become real when they are visible in the external fact as work of force accomplished. But to the mind which is able to draw back from the flux of force in the material universe, to the consciousness which is not imprisoned in its own workings or carried along in their flood but is able to envelop, hold and comprehend them, ...the ideal present to its inner vision is a greater reality than the changing fact obvious to its outer senses. The Idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a partial reflection of the Idea which has created it. (*The Supramental Manifestation*, 1971, p. 301)

The ability to step back and gain a higher, more philosophical perspective on the world of minds, lives, and bodies of which we are part, and which our thoughts and actions impact, is something that we should gain by a serious study of the process of philosophy, its inner workings, ways of thinking, and motives – the perennial impetus towards the perfection of the Human Soul, creation of the Ideal State, and realization of the Good.

We may hold as our goal, therefore, to ignite in ourselves as we pursue this study, and to instill in others, something of that very personal fire, inspiration, and fundamental responsibility for life that we perceive in the writings of Martin Heidegger in his meditations on *Nietzsche, The Will to Power as Art* (1936): “In order to draw near to the essential will of Nietzsche’s thinking, and remain close to it, our thinking must acquire enormous range, plus the ability to see beyond everything that is fatally

contemporary in Nietzsche. His knowledge of art and his struggle on behalf of the possibility of great art are dominated by one thought, which he at one point expresses briefly in the following way: 'What alone can regenerate us? Envisionment of what is perfect.' ...But Nietzsche was also aware of the immense difficulty of such a task. For who is to determine what the perfect is? It could only be those who are themselves perfect and who therefore know what it means." (p. 127) We must be inspired by this study to seek the potential of that perfection in ourselves, understand what it means, and be regenerated by it.

The historical importance of this task of philosophy to Heidegger can be easily seen in certain of his comments on Nietzsche. For example: "Now, if we do not thoughtfully formulate our inquiry in such a way that it is capable of grasping in a unified way the doctrines of the eternal return of the same and will to power, and these two doctrines in their most intrinsic coherence as revaluation, and if we do not go on to comprehend this fundamental formulation as one which is also necessary in the course of Western metaphysics, then we will never grasp Nietzsche's philosophy. And we will comprehend nothing of the twentieth century and of the centuries to come, nothing of our own metaphysical task" (p. 17). That task was stated even more specifically by Heidegger in another seminal essay: "What philosophy essentially can and must be is this: a thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of the knowledge that sets the norms and hierarchies, of the knowledge in which and by which a people fulfills itself historically and culturally, the knowledge that kindles and necessitates all inquiries and thereby threatens all values" (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 1959, p.10).

Although the philosophy of Nietzsche is not a particular focus of our present study, it is sometimes possible to better understand Heidegger through his study of Nietzsche, and through statements such as these to better understand the most general historical issues and themes of philosophy. For these are also the most crucial, immediate and specific ones that we must bear in mind as we approach Whitehead, Heidegger, and Sri Aurobindo, and strive to grasp the relevance of their ideas and

apply them to a reevaluation of our own lives today.

2. Common origins in the language and thought of ancient Greece

The language and thought of the ancient Greeks, and in particular the works of Plato and Aristotle, have played a central, seminal role in each of the major historical periods of philosophical thought and revision that has occurred in the West. It should be no surprise then, that even in the Twentieth Century this is still the case. Although the works of Whitehead, Heidegger, and Sri Aurobindo do not consist in systematic commentaries or exegesis of the classical philosophers, as did the major philosophical works of the Medieval period, they do concern themselves with many of the same central problems, concepts, and formulations, and often acknowledge the importance of the ideas of their ancient Greek predecessors.

For example, in an early chapter of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (1929), he says this:

The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them. His personal endowments, his wide opportunities for experience at a great period of civilization, his inheritance of an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systematization, have made his writings an inexhaustible mine of suggestion. Thus in one sense by stating my belief that the train of thought in these lectures is Platonic, I am doing no more than expressing the hope that it falls within the European tradition. But I do mean more: I mean that if we had to render Plato's general point of view with the least changes made necessary by the intervening two thousand years of human experience in social organization, in aesthetic attainments, in science and religion, we should have to set about the construction of a philosophy of organism. In such a philosophy the actualities constituting the process of the world are conceived as exemplifying the ingression (or 'participation') of other things which constitute the potentialities of definiteness for any actual existence. The

things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal. The two sets are mediated by a thing which combines the actuality of what is temporal with the timelessness of what is potential. (1978 ed., pp.39-40)

Heidegger, in an early chapter of *Being and Time* (1927), while referring to the same concept of Platonic Forms and to the foundations of occidental philosophy in Classical Greek thought, says: "If we may allude to earlier and in their own right altogether incomparable researches on the analysis of being, then we should compare the ontological sections in Plato's *Parmenides* or the fourth chapter of the seventh book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* with a narrative passage from Thucydides. Then we can see the stunning character of the formulations with which their philosophers challenged the Greeks" (1996 ed., p.34). In a later study on *Parmenides*, among several of the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers – Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, Heidegger continues: "The relation between thinking and Being animates all Western reflection. It remains the durable touchstone for determining to what extent and in what way we have been granted both the privilege and capacity to approach that which addresses itself to historical man as to-be-thought. Parmenides names this relation in his saying (Frag.III): For thinking and Being are the same (*to yap auto voeiv estiv te kai eivai*)" (*Early Greek Thinking*, 1984, p.79).

Sri Aurobindo, in an early essay on the pre-Socratic Heraclitus wrote in a similar vein:

We must put each of Heraclitus' apothegms into its right place if we would understand his thought. 'It is wise to admit that all things are one,' – not merely, be it noted, that they came from oneness and will go back to oneness, but that they are one, now and always, – all is, was, and ever will be the ever living Fire. All seems to our experience to be many, an eternal becoming of manifold existences; where is there in it any principle of eternal identity? True, says Heraclitus, so it seems; but wisdom looks beyond and does see the identity of all things; Night and Day, Life and Death, the good and the evil, all are one, the eternal, the identical; those who see only a difference in objects, do not know the truth of the objects they observe. 'Hesiod did not know day and night;

for it is the One,' (*esti yam hev, asti hi ekam*). Now, an eternal and identical which all things are, is precisely what we mean by Being; it is precisely what is denied by those who see only Becoming. (*The Supramental Manifestation*, 1971, p.349)

The ancient ideas of Being, of the identity of Being and Knowing, Consciousness and Force, of the One and the Many, and the priority of Eternal Form over Temporal Substance, have emerged once again in the thought of the greatest philosophers of the Twentieth Century, in the context of quantum physics, biological engineering, and a new synthesis of Eastern and Western Spirituality, as if centuries of analysis and speculation about the nature and relationships of mind and matter were suddenly reborn in a new vision of the Same. In the thought of seers and scientists, and simultaneously in the everyday reality of our life and culture, a new unity is emerging, and a unified theory of mind and life is being actively pursued by physicists and biologists, as well as by philosophers and psychologists. The survival of the human species and the planet are becoming more and more dependent on an ethics of sustainability, on a global scale, which demands a far-reaching, penetrating reevaluation of the human situation. To perform such a reevaluation, and to explain and apply a holistic conception of reality to the world of which we are a part, is the task of philosophy today, the challenge that we must accept.

It is likely that the ideas of Heidegger, Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo will be seen to have played more than an incidental role in the new paradigm that is emerging. It is also likely that their thought will challenge us far more substantially and beneficially than the thoughts of our contemporary historians of little wars and big scandals, just as the Greek thinkers did in the time of Thucydides' wars. A thorough investigation of how the best philosophical thought of the age has developed should lend a deeper significance to our common experience, understanding, and practice, and to our search. Our choices and actions may well become endowed with greater meaning as a result of being steeped anew in the notions of Necessary Truth and the Moral Imperative, in the Ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity, and in the

perennial vision of Oneness through Diversity, the Perfectibility of Life, and the Immortality of the Soul.

It is evident from the examples of their references to the early Greek thinkers given above, however, that the interpretations, distinctions, developments, conclusions reached in their thinking by each of these philosophers, with respect to a similar text or concept, may be either closely similar or widely divergent. And in this discovery lies, precisely, the value of such a comparative study. By following the thought of each individually in order to discover, understand, and appreciate, with added depth and accuracy, their unique interpretations, their original ideas, their carefully considered judgments – about such concepts as reality, existence, being, truth – the point of view of each may enrich the other. And by discovering their points of convergence, divergence, agreement or contradiction, our own grasp of the most fundamental problems of philosophy will be enriched. As we examine the primary texts of each of these philosophers, in relation to each other and to the traditions to which they belong, we shall gain a measured understanding of the development of philosophical thought through the ages, and we shall be equipped with some of the best tools of thought available to us as we move toward our own philosophical thinking and responsible grounding in the world.

3. The primary texts and some fundamental issues

1. A. N. Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, first published in 1929, and based on the author's Gifford Lectures given in 1927-28. The corrected edition by Griffin and Sherburne was published in 1978.
2. Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, the former being first published in 1927, and the latter first presented in a series of lectures the same year, but first published in 1975, under the author's supervision. The translations in use for this study are *Being and Time, A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, by Joan Stambaugh, 1996, and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Translation, Introduction, and Lexicon by Albert Hofstadter, 1988.

3. Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*, first published in serial form in the magazine *Arya* from 1914-19, then in an extensively revised and enlarged book edition in 1940.

Each of these primary philosophical works to be considered in this study is a highly original product of contemplative thought that greatly exceeds any form of merely academic discourse. The manner in which each pursues his vision, the clarity and completion of the statement that each achieves, resonate with a common purpose and power, as if they had traveled by diverse paths to reach a common source of inspiration.

Although the general points of view and final conclusions of the authors may differ with respect to specific issues and arguments, the unity of their systems of knowledge lies in the depth, breadth and power of the vision and statement that each achieves. And yet, it is perhaps not unlikely that the truths they discover about the universe they share may be surprisingly similar in many fundamental respects.

Sri Aurobindo's formulations are likely to be the least familiar to the Western reader, although the terms and formulations of each of these authors will undoubtedly seem obscure to many at first. But the thought of Sri Aurobindo has been widely recognized for its ability to synthesize Eastern and Western philosophy. He brings to the arena an articulation of the Indic tradition of philosophy that makes its terms understandable and relevant to Western philosophical thought. And because of this, as well as its general breadth and depth, his work provides an essential context for understanding the products of contemplative philosophical and spiritual thought in general, regardless of the mind or cultural tradition by which it is produced.

To illustrate this potential, and to put ourselves in touch with the substance of philosophy in a brief and introductory manner at this point, let us consider some examples of fundamental philosophical issues in statements from Heidegger and Whitehead, in relation to similar statements of Sri Aurobindo that may help to synthesize, complete and clarify the ideas of his Western contemporaries. It should be understood that to take such examples out of context is contrary to the principles

and purpose of this study, and may greatly diminish their value. However, it should be a worthwhile exercise with respect to anticipating the method to be undertaken in the detailed discussions that follow, as well as setting forth in a preliminary way, some of the basic territory to be explored.

We will learn, for example, that for Heidegger, as for Aristotle, the primary question for philosophy is What is Being? As Aristotle put it in his *Metaphysics* (IV.1-2): "There is a science which takes up the theory of being as being and of what 'to be' means, taken by itself. ...Clearly, then, the theory of beings as being constitutes a single science. And since any science deals chiefly with what is primary to its subject, other considerations being derived from and dependent upon the primary, the philosopher must have within his province the first principles and primary factors of primary beings" (Hope trans., 1968, pp.61-62).

The entire history of Western metaphysics can be traced back to these statements of Aristotle and to the terms and definitions that he formulated as necessary to a science of Being. Subsequent philosophical debates have therefore focused on such distinctions, for example, as those to be made between essential being – "what" a thing is, and actual being – "that" a thing is, which preoccupied much of Scholastic Philosophy in the Medieval Period. That discussion leads to the fundamental relationship between a general definition, and the particular thing that exemplifies it, to the notion of a One and a Many, to the Socratic/Platonic theory of Eternal Forms and their participation in Material Things, and to the preoccupation of modern philosophy with its many explorations of the distinction between subjective knowledge (of the essence of a thing) and objective existence (of the thing itself).

For Heidegger, the problem for Western philosophy from the beginning has been the immediate digression in Aristotle's discussion to the definition of "primary beings" and the consequent preoccupation with the definition of beings (things) that are the everyday objects of experience. Heidegger therefore thought it necessary to get back to a pre-Socratic contemplation of Being itself, and that to do this requires

another way of thinking. It may be said here that Heidegger's entire philosophical effort is focused on elaborating this problem and discovering an adequate, other way of thinking. Therefore, in a commentary on *Being and Time* in a letter of 1947 he said: "Yet Being – what is Being? It is It itself. The thinking that is to come must learn to experience that and to say it. "Being" – that is not God and not a cosmic ground. Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from man. Man at first clings always and only to beings. But when thinking represents beings as beings it no doubt relates itself to Being. In truth, however, it always thinks only of beings as such; precisely not, and never, Being as such. The "question of Being" always remains a question about beings. It is still not at all what its elusive name indicates: the question in the direction of Being" (*Basic Writings*, p. 234).

These somewhat mystifying remarks were made by Heidegger to a student, largely in defense of his position, as a result of his popular moral indictment for having associated himself for a brief period with the Third Reich. The question being raised was therefore primarily an ethical one. What should such a "thinking in the direction of Being" have to do with one's actions? The implication to which Heidegger was in part responding, was that his philosophical position somehow constituted, or could possibly constitute, a negation of both humanitarian ideals and God. His response was therefore directed to these concerns, and also to a more general clarification of his philosophy. It is an interesting and important statement, which we will consider in more detail at a later point in the study. For the moment, however, let us hear him on the question of God.

The statement that the essence of man consists in being-in-the-world... (note: *Dasein*, for Heidegger, is the term that represents *Being*, more specifically, *being-here/there, being-in-the world [RH]*)...contains no decision about whether man in a theologico-metaphysical sense is merely a this-worldly or an other-worldly creature. With the existential determination of the essence of man, therefore, nothing is decided

about the "existence of God" or his "non-being," no more than about the possibility or impossibility of gods. Thus it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of man from the relation of his essence to the truth of Being is atheism. ...the thinking that thinks from the question concerning the truth of Being questions more primordially than metaphysics can. Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify. Or should we not first be able to hear and understand all these words carefully if we are to be permitted as men, that is, as ek-sistent creatures, to experience a relation of God to man? How can man at the present stage of world history ask at all seriously and rigorously whether the god nears or withdraws, when he has above all neglected to think into the dimension in which alone that question can be asked? (*Basic Writings*, p. 252-253)

Thus, in his inimitable style, Heidegger, in his famous "Letter on Humanism," raises the essential issues of God, ethics, being, metaphysics, and religion by making them all dependent upon the prior question How are these things to be thought? For him, this is the most fundamental question and perhaps marks the turning point of philosophy for our age. For he also makes it clear that the tradition of logical thought, as might be expected, is not the method that he will recommend. In fact, he says quite emphatically in the same letter: "Being, as the element of thinking, is abandoned by the technical interpretation of thinking. "Logic," beginning with the Sophists and Plato, sanctions this explanation. Thinking is judged by a standard that does not measure up to it. Such judgment may be compared to the procedure of trying to evaluate the essence and powers of a fish by seeing how long it can live on dry land" (*Basic Writings*, p. 219).

However, with respect to the question of the more primordial thinking that Heidegger indicates, and its potential for determining the quality of life and action, Sri Aurobindo seems to have some definite answers, or at least a helpful point of view. Referring back to the language of the Upanishads, as a philosopher whose thought is based in Indic traditions

must do, while at the same time recognizing the limitations to normal (i.e. traditional) metaphysical thought, Sri Aurobindo points to a kind of thinking and knowing that would seem to fit Heidegger's requirements. In an early chapter of *The Life Divine* titled The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge, Sri Aurobindo offers a critique of reason that leads him to another method of knowing, one that he says must be employed in order to obtain a true understanding of being.

Reason accepts a mixed action when it confines itself to the circle of our sensible experience, admits its law as the final truth and concerns itself only with the study of phenomenon, that is to say, with the appearances of things in their relations, processes and utilities. ... Reason...accepts its pure action, when accepting our sensible experiences as a starting-point but refusing to be limited by them it goes behind, judges, works in its own right and strives to arrive at general and unalterable concepts which attach themselves not to the appearances of things, but to that which stands behind their appearances.

The complete use of pure reason brings us finally from physical to metaphysical knowledge. But the concepts of metaphysical knowledge do not in themselves fully satisfy the demand of our integral being. They are indeed entirely satisfactory to the pure reason itself, because they are the very stuff of its own existence.

The one means we have left in our mentality is an extension of that form of knowledge by identity which gives us the awareness of our own existence. It is really upon a self-awareness more or less conscient, more or less present to our conception that the knowledge of the contents of our self is based. Or to put it in a more general formula, the knowledge of the contents is contained in the knowledge of the continent. If then we can extend our faculty of mental self-awareness to awareness of the Self beyond and outside us, Atman or Brahman of the Upanishads, we may become possessors in experience of the truths which form the contents of the Atman or Brahman in the universe.

When the self-awareness in the mind applied, both to continent and content, to own-self and other-self, exalts itself into the luminous self-manifest identity, the reason also converts itself into the form of the self-luminous intuitional knowledge. This is the highest possible state of

our knowledge when mind fulfills itself in the supramental. (1949, p. 58-63)

It will be appropriate to ask, at a later point in our study, whether Heidegger was perhaps on the path to discovering such an intuitional knowledge, and the Vedantic method, but from a Western route. For he does suggest that knowledge of the truth of being is to be obtained through the self, and that such knowing is one with being: "Being, actuality, existence belong among the most universal concepts that the ego, as it were, brings with it. These concepts were and are therefore called innate ideas, *ideae innatae*. They reside in the human Dasein from the very outset" (*The Basic problems of Phenomenology*, 1988, p.74). "Knowing is a mode of being of Da-sein as being-in-the-world, and has its ontic foundation in this constitution of being" (*Being and Time*, p. 57).

But the idea that to know the Being of beings, in a universal way, through the self by identity, requires a supramental transformation of mind, is the theme of Sri Aurobindo's entire philosophical work. And he discovers such a process to be both the psychological meaning of the entire corpus of Vedic and Vedantic knowledge, and the method employed by its seers and poets throughout the age of classical Indian thought. Its purpose, moreover, was never solely to acquire knowledge, but also and more importantly to effect a transformation of life. This is perhaps what most distinguishes the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo from that of Whitehead and Heidegger, whose systems seem largely deficient in the principles of ethics and *praxis*, though this is not necessarily true of the classical Western tradition. If we ask of Sri Aurobindo then, how this intuitive supramental self-knowledge and world-knowledge, which would seem to be in line with Heidegger's aspiration, might affect one's ethical actions, the answer is immediate.

So long as the intuition fixes itself only upon that which we become, we see ourselves as a continual progression of movement and change in consciousness in the eternal succession of Time. ...But there is a supreme experience and supreme intuition by which we go back behind our surface self and find that this becoming, change, succession are only a mode of our being and that there is that in us which is not

involved at all in the becoming. Not only can we have the intuition of this that is stable and eternal in us, not only can we have the glimpse of it in experience behind the veil of continually fleeting becomings, but we can draw back into it and live in it entirely, so effecting an entire change in our external life, and in our attitude, and in our action upon the movement of the world.

The pure existent is then a fact and no mere concept; it is the fundamental reality. But, let us hasten to add, the movement, the energy, the becoming are also a fact, also a reality. The supreme intuition and its corresponding experience may correct the other, may go beyond, may suspend, but do not abolish it. We have therefore two fundamental facts of pure existence and of world-existence, a fact of Being, a fact of Becoming. To deny one or the other is easy; to recognize the facts of consciousness and find out their relation is the true and fruitful wisdom. (LD, p. 73-74)

Whitehead seems to have reached a similar understanding of Being and Becoming in the final chapter of his *Process and Reality*. And his method of reasoning seems surprisingly parallel to that of Sri Aurobindo in many ways, as we shall see. But he too fails to supply us with any indication of what impact the understanding that he achieves might have on the choices and actions in one's daily life. And at the same time, although he recognizes the same two poles – the Stable/Mental and the Changing/Physical – as necessary and fundamental principles of this conscious and organic universe that we inhabit, they apparently remain necessary to each other only in conception, i.e., in order to explain logically the relativity of this dualistic universe. Here again, it seems that Sri Aurobindo's understanding can supply an important resolution. For example, to quote Whitehead:

Opposed elements stand to each other in mutual requirement. In their unity, they inhibit or contrast. God and the World stand to each other in this opposed requirement. God is the infinite ground of all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity. The World is the multiplicity of finites, actualities seeking a perfected unity. Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the

other.

In every respect God and the World move conversely to each other in respect to their process. God is primordially one, namely, he is the primordial unity of relevance of the many potential forms; in the process he acquires a consequent multiplicity, which the primordial character absorbs into its own unity. The World is primordially many, namely the many actual occasions with their physical finitude; in the process it acquires a consequent unity, which is a novel occasion and is absorbed into the multiplicity of the primordial character. Thus God is to be conceived as one and as many in the converse sense in which the World is to be conceived as many and as one. The theme of Cosmology, which is the basis of all religions, is the story of the dynamic effort of the World passing into everlasting unity, and of the static majesty of God's vision, accomplishing its purpose of completion by absorption of the World's multiplicity of effort. (p. 348-349)

Whitehead's *Process and Reality* may in fact be the most perfect formulation of the Platonic/Aristotelian cosmology yet achieved. As such, however, it may still remain open to the very criticism of metaphysics and logical thought that Heidegger so frequently reiterates in his call for another way of thinking. And, at the same time, we may find assistance from Sri Aurobindo and the Vedantic method in resolving, for ourselves, the apparent deficiency of such a model, which indeed may satisfy the requirements of "pure reason," but not the "demand of our integral being" for an experience of the truth that is seen, and a dynamic application of it in our lives and in the world at large.

For in Whitehead's vision of an organic universe where each "actual entity" or "temporal occasion" is a "concrescence" of ideal forms and physical atoms in polar balance, perpetually in search of the next, novel concrescence, and where mental processes are as ubiquitous as physical ones, human consciousness and intention are apparently of minor importance. As he says, "Mental activity is one of the modes of feeling belonging to all actual entities in some degree, but only amounting to conscious intellectuality in some actual entities. ...To be actual must mean that all actual things are alike objects, enjoying objective

immortality in fashioning creative actions; and that all actual things are subjects, each prehending the universe from which it arises. The creative action is the universe always becoming one in a particular unity of self-experience, and thereby adding to the multiplicity which is the universe as many. This insistent concrescence into unity is the outcome of the ultimate self-identity of each entity" (p. 56-57).

The theologico-scientific world-view presented by Whitehead is one in which the world of the eternal mental ideal atomized in creative time and space is indeed a kind of "universal consciousness" in which Being and Knowing are one, which yet stands opposed to the imperfect world of our limited experience. And it appears that for Whitehead, as for Plato and some schools of Eastern Philosophy, it may be the fate of little human consciousness to remain below in the darkness of the cave of illusion and unknowing, deprived of the vision of unity and truth. And yet, he nevertheless affirms, as do Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo, that the unity, the truth of oneness, is the Reality, of which each and every entity and moment and temporal process is the expression. It is perhaps in the ontological emphasis of each of these philosophers' work – their insistence on the ultimately knowable and irreducible totality of the Real – that we may find an indication of the unity of truth and the end of the age of modernism.

On Heidegger's Philosophy

Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo

1

Let us keep in mind these phrases that Heidegger takes from the pre-socratic Greek thinker: *meleta to pan* (take into care being as a whole), and *arche ton onton to apeiron* (the origin of beings delimits or repels the infinite)

These phrases are discussed at length in the little book with which I want to begin this course, *Basic Concepts*. This book is a 1940 course he gave which is a good example of the idea that Heidegger's work is a continuous reflection on *Being and Time* (1927). Many of his works are a continuation of *Being and Time*. I find that in the forties and fifties, he examined this theme in many lectures which became books. In one titled *What is Called Thinking* (1951), there are two series of ten lectures which are a contemplation of the question of Being. In the fifties he published another book called *The Principle of Reason*, which is about Leibnitz's philosophy, but it is an original reflection on the question What is Being?. Everything has a reason, is the argument, and the reason for everything is its origin. It always goes back to *arche*, origin.

In this little book of reflections called *Basic Concepts* we also find two clear points of departure in philosophy: Gebser clearly finds here his inspiration for *The Ever Present Origin* written ten years later, in 1949, and Derrida's philosophy of difference also has its roots in this book, as we will see. In Gebser's case, his book is a bridge between Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo. He oscillates back and forth between the two throughout his book. And in Derrida, the act of deconstruction is performed by looking into being, the being of beings; he focuses on something like a work of art, or a principle of society or economics, or literature, and peels back all the layers of interpretation to find the whole. The whole of something is its past, its future, its potentiality, its connections, its fulfilment or its lack,

all are a part of its being. Nothing is what it is in the moment. The concept of 'being and time' is that time is necessary for the revealing of Being.

So this phrase *meleta to pan*, take into care being as a whole, means to care for the being of beings. To do philosophy according to Heidegger, to practice philosophy, means to care about being. This is what I would like for us to move towards: philosophy as practice. Heidegger uses language to guide thinking towards being. So he asks the question, What is Being? And how is it not 'beings'? What is the relationship between beings and being? This is the origin of Derrida's philosophy of difference. We are always aware of the being of beings but we always put it in the background and allow ourselves to be preoccupied with beings; and to that extent we forget about Being, unless we make an effort to recover its thinking and realize that the two cannot be separated. Heidegger constantly points out this problem of the human being, being preoccupied with beings. It is a shrinking of time and a reduction of reality.

This is also an interesting connection with the philosophy of Bergson who criticizes logical thought and elaborates the reductive tendency of the mind which captures a mental picture, cuts out a frame, and calls it reality. For example, we all know what 'evolution' is. But we don't actually know what it is at all; it is much too vast and complex for our mind to grasp; we can only arrive at a concept or a theory of evolution. So Heidegger raises the question in this way: is Being also only a concept, the most universal concept? Being is a kind of nominalization of the verb to be. 'Being' is what is. So, is Being only what is? In metaphysics people always discuss being as if it were something else. And often they arrive at the concept of emptiness. Being is an empty concept. Kantian philosophy contemplates this idea quite seriously, and Heidegger pursues a process of thinking with the aim of the eventual destruction of this idea of being as emptiness.

Being refers to what is, as a whole, according to the pre-socratic phrase, 'the taking into care of being as a whole'. This is a yogic concept that we

also read about in Sri Aurobindo. He teaches the universalization of consciousness; the technique he recommends in order to move from rational mind to higher mind and Overmind is to learn to see things in terms of universals: beauty, utility, harmony, power, Nature. We can observe every aspect of nature as part of the web of life; the web of life becomes a universal in which every aspect of nature can be seen, felt, understood, identified; in its niche, its birth, its dying, its struggle and reproduction. Each thing can be seen as the action of Mahalakshmi in her material, vital unfolding in time. We can learn to observe the behavior of nature, human behavior, every thing in nature, as the flow of the divine shakti.

By observing human behavior in society as vortices or spirals of ascending and descending consciousness, from the vital physical to the vital mental to the higher mental and supramental, we can observe the development of society, up and down through all the stages of development through which human societies pass. The being of human civilization is what Sri Aurobindo writes about in *The Human Cycle*. Every chapter is a dynamic restatement of that universal perception of the developmental stages through which societies grow. He constantly describes the series of stages, rather than being preoccupied with one or another stage. He describes where each stage or level of society fits in the universal pattern. This is the universalization of consciousness that he practiced and that he advocates. And I believe that Heidegger is moving in the same direction.

Heidegger's discussion of being as the most universal concept moves in two directions. One is the discussion of being as a concept that includes every being: the most universal concept. The other direction is the discussion of the being of beings, i.e. that beings are what they are. Society is what it is, technology is what it is, humans are what they are. This saying: *arche ton onton to apeiron*, conveys the idea that everything that is, and what it is, has emerged into presence from origin, and at some point it defects and passes back into non-presence. While it is in presence it is what it is. In its changes, its coming and going into being and out of being, in its limitations and its potentials, each thing is what it

is as an emergence into presence. This coming into being (presence) and passing out of presence is what 'beings' do, in a continuum of existence in which Being continues always to be the ground. In this saying, *arche* is not a point of beginning; it is the constant emergence into and passing out of presence of beings. Gebser, (who has done the most thorough study of the developmental stages of human civilization), gets his idea of the ever-present origin from this concept.

To apeiron, the unlimited, the infinite, is repelled or overcome by the limitations of each thing as it comes into and passes out of being. This delimits the infinite. But by delimiting the infinite, the infinite itself is not limited; only the being becomes what it is, but the infinite itself continues to repel that limit as it repels the infinite. Infinity is repelled by the beings that come into and pass out of Being. In this concept of *to apeiron (the infinite)* in relation to *arche (origin)*, neither of these poles or aspects – the origin of the thing and the infinite it repels – adequately defines being, because being is both the infinite and the emergence into presence of beings.

This concept of emergence into and out of the infinite by beings, the Greeks eventually decided to call *phusis*. It is the process of things themselves, the energy of existence, which in Sanskrit is *prakriti*; this concept of the presencing of beings is a concept of energy in motion. And it leads to the question How and Why are beings what they are?, and this questioning becomes the analysis of the relationship of beings as they are 'now' with their next or previous phase of development, and their relationships with other causes and effects, which constitute the limits of what they can become. The concept that is being described seems to be the twofold concept of *prakriti* and *purusha*, nature and being. That into which and out of which beings arise and become what they are is Being (*purusha/self*); the how and why, and all the intermediate exchanges of energy which take place in the process, are *prakriti/nature*. This is the concept that the teaching of Heidegger seems to be attempting to guide the mind towards, rather than (I would suggest) to frame these concepts in predetermined names or fundamental principles, such as Brahman, Maya, Form and Substance,

etc. In the more traditional mode of teaching, such ideas become beings, and as such, conceal the idea of Being. Heidegger has some clever ways of guiding thinking away from its traditional grooves.

Daniel: Would you say then that Heideggerian reflections are a way to get beyond the mental into higher mind?

Yes, unequivocally. *Basic Concepts* is a particularly good example of this. It is a collection of two or three page reflections which put you in a perceptive mode for grasping a concept which is ancient and difficult. It is not the way you normally think about things. His problem is, can it be shown? Heidegger's basic premise is that truth, *aletheia*, means uncovering the untrue, uncovering limited and opinionated thought and perception until the truth of things themselves stands in light. The thing itself uncovers itself by coming into being. The human being who is dwelling in practical mind and opinionated routine living is a partially concealed human being. It has not emerged into what it means to be a true human being. The observing mind can help to bring out the potentiality which is concealed in being. The definition of truth is not a correct statement or correspondence with the facts. For Heidegger that is the falsehood that has taken place in thinking between the pre-socratics and the present. Thinking now means analyzing and reducing things to practical statements and theories, by which we lose contact with the reality about which we are speaking. Both the reality and the understanding get reduced to a framework that is useful but it is not the force and quality and nature of things themselves which can be known 'gnostically', by identity.

2

Because, eventually, it may be possible to compare Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo, (this is one of our goals), it is important to realize that both of them have presented their metaphysical philosophy from three points of view. One is the classical, ancient, scriptural point of view. Both have based their thinking on ancient language and concepts. Both have

developed rational, philosophical reasons to justify and communicate their philosophy. And both have relied on experience. Therefore we can say conventionally that they have presented arguments from scripture, from reason, and from experience. And for both everything finally depends on experience.

This short and concise text, *Basic Concepts*, is a good example of these three approaches. Heidegger dwells on a few passages from Anaximander and attempts to bring out the meaning of these ancient expressions that are no longer thought; they are hardly thinkable. In Sri Aurobindo's case he has brought back Vedic Sanskrit texts that are hardly readable any more. And yet he found there the source of his philosophy. There is a combination of linguistic genius and philosophical intentionality that has enabled both of them to bring out the meanings from ancient languages that would otherwise probably not be accessible to us. Sri Aurobindo happens to have also been a Greek scholar at Cambridge and situates much of his thought in the context of classical Greek as well as Sanskrit writings. For example, he wrote a series of essays on Heraclitus which is very much along the lines of Heidegger's thinking.

What we might realize on this path is something about the ancient mentality before calculative thought came into the picture. That's why Heidegger is interested in it. He sees in that way of thinking a way to address our loss of a closer identity with the world, because we are only interested in manipulating it. Both thinkers are trying to bring back into perspective a way of seeing that is not so accessible to our thinking or experience today. We benefit from going with them into this process of revealing, through classical language, a way of thinking other than the one we are accustomed to.

Here Heidegger refers to scriptural statements from Anaximander, then he develops a tight and concise philosophical argument concerning the difference between being and beings, as he has done in many texts, but this one is exceptionally tight and almost Upanishadic. Then, finally, he guides our thinking, if we are willing, along a pathway towards a seeing

of being, and not just a thinking about being, but a seeing of being as the Same. In the writings on Heraclitus by Sri Aurobindo and in Heidegger's writings on the pre-socratics, both have referred to the writings of Nietzsche who is well known for his philosophy of "the eternal recurrence of the same". Now what is this 'the same'? This is the secret that Heidegger is moving towards, the seeing of being, the *idein*. The seeing of the idea or reality of something in Greek is *idein*. This concept of the Same is what Heidegger concludes these reflections with. And I have noted that in *The Ever-Present Origin*, in Gebser's chapter on the philosophy of time, the first thing he refers to is "the incipient saying of being in the fragment of Anaximander". And almost everything he says about origin and time comes from this short commentary of Heidegger, which Gebser acknowledges openly as a fundamental understanding of time brought forward by Heidegger.

This seeing of the Same concerns the emergence and passing away of temporal beings. Temporal beings emerge into their duration and pass out of presence, back into that out of which they emerge, which might be thought of as 'nothing' but which is actually the infinite source of everything, the *apeiron*. *Arche* means the emergence, *ton onton* is beings, in relation to or in the infinite, *apeiron*. Heidegger interprets this phrase as meaning 'the origin of everything repels limit, or moves towards the infinite'. Beings have a temporal duration, whereas Being is that into which beings emerge and pass away. Apparently there is a way of identifying with the whole, as in the phrase *meleta to pan*, which Heidegger interprets as 'caring for being as a whole'. This, he believes, is the fundamental philosophy of the Greeks: being is the fitting together of beings as a whole, but it is also the source, the force, the emergence and pervasiveness and limit, which is constantly being exceeded. Temporal beings are not permanent but there is a permanence in the temporality of which they are, and in which they fit, as a part of the whole.

We are moving on this path toward seeing Being as the infinite source and also as a need. Heidegger draws out of Anaximander the phrase *to chreon*, the cry, or the need, of being that brings forth things. He says

this is not a lack, but an overflowing of freedom. The essence of being is the infinite repelling of limit through the emergence of beings. So it is not an emptiness or void. The essence of being is this repelling of limit, which is also the need of being. (These expressions of Being as overflowing freedom, origin and repelling the infinite convey the sense of power and of the empowerment of beings.)

In the section on "the connection between being and time" Heidegger says that in Greek, *kronos* means what corresponds to *topos*, the place and the time where each being belongs. "*Kronos* is the always favorable and granted time, as distinguished from the untimely. It never means a serial ordering of now points one after the other, but the allotment character that lies within time itself as what is always the proper sending, granting, and ordaining time, the duration of a being." Everything that is comes into itself through a process of time, and fulfils its potential through a process of time, and passes back into the Same through a process of time. This has become the main theme of Gebser's book, *The Ever-Present Origin*. This atemporal way of seeing things, is understanding time as primarily the duration of being. If you think about yourself or some project or thing that you have, you can conceive of it as not having a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, but it goes on until it becomes what it is, in terms of its purpose, function, form, essence. And it was always that. This is fundamental to the Greek concept of time. Aristotle's most well-known book, *The Physics*, is all about this. In it he says something that has always fascinated me. He said that in defining the fundamental principles of existence, he could easily explain two, matter and form – form being the nature of something and matter the substance, but the most difficult thing to explain was the third principle: motion. Matter becomes a form though a process of change which we do not see until it becomes what it is. We are always thinking about the end that the thing will become, its form and its purpose. For example a carpenter's chiseling of wood to make a table is not something we see happening; at some point the table stands. We do not think of the table as the wood pieces falling from the chisel. The process of making it is motion, matter being in motion to become a

form. Anything we think of as happening or that we do has an energy and duration necessary to it which can't be more and can't be less. The artificial notion of time that we have is quite different from this classical Greek notion that we are trying to grasp.

Heidegger says, "Time is in itself the kind of thing that directs and allots." So when he says *meleta to pan*, he translates it as 'take care of the being of beings as a whole'. It is like the concept of the Divine Mother who is all pervading and gives the energy to each being to become what it is. It's a mythical concept. This is the mythical structure emerging at a post-rational level. It's the 'integral structure' that Heidegger seems to be trying to discern or to point out. "Time is the allotment of presencing for what presences in each case." Being does this. Being allots to each thing its presence in the infinite, against limit.

Earlier in the book, when Heidegger was discussing the emptiness of the concept of being from the linguistic point of view, he made some comments that seem especially Upanishadic. He said, "It could appear that something important is concealed in what is named by the noun 'being', something important and in this case especially profound, even though the title 'being' nevertheless remains just a nametag for emptiness. And yet behind the uniformity and emptiness of the word "is", a scarcely considered richness conceals itself. ...While being yet remains closer to us than everything nearest, and farther than all that is farthest, it is a matter of becoming aware of our essential abode in Being. Being is overly near. All talk about it as near and closest has already distanced it. For the nearest proximity already essentially includes distance. Being never stands back from us because it is that into which we are placed."

"To this extent," says Heidegger, "*aletheia*, truth, is the unconcealing of the Same, to *apeiron*, the infinite, in each being." There are resonances here with the Isha Upanishad, which, as we have said, is the basis of *The Life Divine*. "That moves, and that moves not. That is far, and the same is near. That is in all this, and that also is outside all this. But he who sees the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not

thereafter from aught." Sri Aurobindo points out that we can get a clear impression from this passage of the difference between *vidya* and *avidya*. *Avidya* is seeing things as they appear, beings; *vidya* is seeing things as the Self, in the Self, which is the Same, universal being. I think Heidegger was moving through his forest in this direction. But the Western approach is always concerned with motion, with becoming. The Eastern point of view is always concerned with the static, the motionless, the permanent. When we compare Sri Aurobindo and Heidegger, we can see that they are really touching the core of their respective traditions. And Heidegger cannot get away from time, as Heraclitus could not get away from the river into which you cannot step twice. The whole mystery of movement and change preoccupies the Western mind, and the whole mystery of the permanence that underlies all of the change preoccupies the Eastern mind.

In his essay on Heraclitus, Sri Aurobindo speaks about Nietzsche and the philosophy of the eternal recurrence of the same, where he says something very interesting. He says Nietzsche seems to speak always about becoming rather than about being. *But*, he says, *...but*, if we think about the Brahman as being all energy, and all existence, then the becoming too is Brahman. Especially in Nietzsche and Heidegger, we can always read this paradox in what they say, and it seems that for them becoming *is* Being. They have a perception of the being of beings as a whole but all their thinking is conditioned by this Western compulsion to define change, energy, motion, cause and effect, and to explain those things against the background of the Same, which they also perceive.

(Note: Essay was transcribed and adapted from the University of Human Unity lectures in Auroville presented on September 19 and 26, 2011)

Heidegger's Platonism

Plato started discussing the relationship between sensation and perception two thousand five hundred years ago, and we are still discussing it today; that is our topic tonight. We speak about visual

impressions, and we unconsciously process visual information all the time, but we have no idea how it happens. Just as we probably don't know how the computer chip works. We process information all the time with computers, but how that tiny silicon chip with circuits soldered to it stores infinite quantities of information is not something we understand. Somebody of course understands the theoretical explanation of how it works, but even that person isn't going to know how, at the most physical, atomic level of its matter, how the silicon chip stores data.

When we start to think about 'sensation and perception' we have first to ask what we mean by these terms. And then we may recall what Hume and Aquinas have thought about it, or what Plato and Aristotle thought about it, and we start a process of reflection that brings us into our own thinking. Are we then remembering, or are we generating some new information? How much of what I am going to say now is stored in my mind and your mind and in thousands of other minds, somewhere, and stored in hundreds of books that, like sheet music, help us to awaken to this chord system of thinking? And then we enter into an active, present process of thinking in which memory is a part of the whole stream, but we have no idea where it is located. It is a huge mystery. It is as much a mystery as where that text of Plato was located when I downloaded it from the internet. It is stored in some computer somewhere, where it was an originally scanned and stored and uploaded document, in a chip that gets accessed by my computer millions of miles away. Our memory system is also one of those mysteries that we cannot hope to understand, and yet it forms the basis of almost everything we do.

Memory is always present with us in some way.

This question of perception comes up in Heidegger's commentary on Plato's text, the Allegory of the Cave in *The Republic*, which Heidegger has translated here, (and there are at least three commonly known English translations: by Jowett, Cornford, and Shorey.) In this dialogue Plato introduces a discussion of the question, What is truth? And what are ideas? And how are ideas related to sensations and perceptions? This is a very basic problem of philosophy and in many contexts it is thought

that this is what philosophy is all about: the understanding of knowledge, and truth. What is the meaning of that concept, and why do we care about it. This is a really fundamental question of philosophy. What is truth, and how do we know anything at all about it?

In Heidegger's commentary, he says, "Plato speaks of a *topos noetos*"; *noetos* is related to *noein*, which means knowing, which happens in a plane of mind called *nous*. *Nous* has been a prevalent concept in Western philosophy since Plato, and it means the function of higher mind, of knowing the meaning of ideas. It is the plane of understanding. Where does the idea of 'understanding' reside? We believe we understand a lot about life and spirituality and philosophy and language. All of that knowledge resides somewhere other than the knowledge of where we switch on the light in the room, or how to light the fire to boil water, or which hand to use to adjust the mirror on the motor bike. That kind of knowledge resides in a memory that is very physical. But the knowledge of ideas resides in another domain. And normally human beings have thought that ideas like knowledge and justice and truth and the meaning of existence are more important and have a special rank. They reside in a plane called *nous*, and we get them by a process which is other than the practical process of living, a process of contemplation of things we cannot see.

Heidegger says that *nous* is the faculty of non-sensory experience or seeing, or of understanding things as what they are, their essence, the being of things. *Ta noeta* is the perceivable in knowing. So when we know something like an idea, that idea comes from the world. Somehow, in the world, we notice something like injustice or deception or falsehood. These things are closely related and go together. We know about things that happen in the world, and from that context of relationships we derive the concept of justice or injustice. That concept doesn't reside in a particular place or time; it isn't the result of a visual or aural perception; or smell or taste or touch. We can't put our finger on injustice. But we know it to be a reality. And that reality is the *noeta*. And the *noein* is our perception of it.

Just like the blue color that resides in the cloth, when we perceive that blue color, we perceive *that blue color in the cloth*. It is not something in our eye or in our brain. There is a certain school of psychology that likes to say we are processing some light waves in our brain and perceiving a subjective phenomenon. There is undoubtedly some such process going on in our brain from the eye's stimulation, but we can see quite clearly that we are looking at *that blue blouse*, and we are not seeing it somewhere in the brain or mind. This is a fundamental truth that is falsified in a lot of theoretical psychology, which is so eager to figure out how we know things, that it has created an elaborate theoretical structure to explain that we don't really know anything outside of ourselves. We only know the products of our own information processing. We may think that what we see resides outside us in the world, but we can't prove that; we can only speculate that it exists out there. What nonsense. There has been a prevalence of this kind of scientific subjectivism in philosophy for about two hundred years that is totally different from the subjectivism of the ancients.

Plato makes a strong argument for the existence of color in the world, and also for the existence of ideas in the world. Ideas are not the products of our brain. Ideas are that *noeta* which we perceive. There is injustice in the world. And there is a kind of intelligence that human beings manifest in their behavior, which is logical, and it is not just a concoction of our mind that human beings think logically. They do think logically, and we see it all the time. It is a fact and we perceive it. We don't perceive this with our eyes or ears or nose or tongue or skin. The thinking of the human being is perceived in another way, which is the question of philosophy. Plato speaks of a *topos noetos*. *Topos*, like topography, we can easily understand. It is a place, it is a plane of reality. It has dimensionality. There is a plane of human intelligence which has its field, the field of logical thinking and intelligence, and the field of perceptions, which we all share. We all perceive the book on the table. *Topos noetos*, the place where the book is perceived. There is the perceivable in the perception.

Now what is the relationship between the perceivable and the

perception? In the case of the book, there is obviously a visual information process that goes on in our awareness, and we can touch it. We also know it is a book; it is a concept we share. When we see it, we don't think it is merely a glossy surface; we think it is a book. And it is. It is a true perception. But the question that runs through Western philosophy is, How does our eye happen to tell us that this is a book? Is that dimensionality and plane and color in our eye? Is that information in our eye? If it happens to be a computer with speakers and we are listening to a lecture stored in the computer, we hear and see a person speaking, we have audial and visual information about the person speaking, and intellectual information that we are hearing; is that information in our ears and our eyes? Here is the mystery for philosophy. What is the relationship between the audial and visual information and our understanding of the lecture?

The key word in that question is: relationship. What is the relationship between, or among, or through, our visual perception, our audial perception, and our understanding of the lecture? You are now experiencing what David Hume called a composite perception. You are seeing me speak and you are hearing my words, just as if there were a computer generating a memory of this lecture. I am a little more animated and real than the computer generated lecture, but there is not much difference. The computer is full of mechanisms we don't understand and so is this organism. The organism is more complex but they are equally not understood. So what is the relationship between the visual and audial sensations you are receiving and your understanding of the meaning of my lecture?

No one has a problem understanding this comparison of my organism with the computer. It is easier to understand than the *noeta* and the *noein*, which you can also understand. And everyone understood that there is a relationship between the injustice we perceive, through various perceptions we have, and we understand that the injustice exists in the world, and it's a reality. It becomes, in our perception, a concept of the reality. That *noein* of the *noeta* is the idea (of injustice). Here I am just paraphrasing Heidegger. By quoting Plato, who is the authority from

ancient times, he raises, again, this question of the relationship, and he follows Plato's argument closely. Plato demonstrates, through a dialectical process, that knowledge doesn't reside in the eye or the ear or the other sense organs. We somehow employ our faculties of sensation to come to something called non-sensory perception. And we know that memory underlies that perception as well, because we couldn't conceive of the relationship with what I am saying and what a computer could be saying without memory, because there is no computer in the room. Human beings can operate on the basis of the memory of things that are not present, which other animals apparently cannot do. So how is this possible? How do we perceive things that are not present to our sensory system?

Plato argues that there must be another, unifying faculty, a faculty that unifies the sensory perceptions, and also the relationship between the knower and the known. There must be a plane of reality that unifies the relationship between what I am saying and what you are understanding, or between what the computer provides through your sensory apparatus and your awareness of the intellectual content of the sound and vision. The question that Plato raises, which has fascinated human beings for two thousand five hundred years is, How is it that human consciousness unifies all of these 'iotas of data', bits of information, so that we have a non-sensory perception of an idea?

Comment: Do you really want an answer? Shall we name it? Brahman.

"According to Plato's reflection," writes Heidegger, "there must be something like a single-sighted nature." – (something in nature that has the ability of a unification of perception, a singularity of perception. Because we do that, we do unify our perceptions and know a lot about things, that doesn't depend on individual separate sensations.) "In which all of these – color, sound, taste, – converge; something like a singular en-visibility. This would then be the center from which, or by means of which, we have the perceptual object immediately before us. What one calls this singular en-visibility is at bottom irrelevant." (You can call it

Brahman, or Atman or Mind, or whatever.) "One can call it soul – *psuche*. But if so, if we have already used this word 'soul' *psuche*, and continue to use it, we must understand it precisely in the sense of *mia tis idea* – that through which comes the unified idea." (Soul. Purusha. The witness who unifies all the *noeta* in the *noein*. This was Plato's idea.) Heidegger says, "What does Plato mean? This is what we wish to clarify, so far as possible, at this point. In the following, we shall come to a more concrete and denser characterization. The impossibility of this uncanny state of affairs implies that there must be something like an idea." This is what Platonic philosophy is most known for. Plato speaks always about ideas. What are they? And what is their relationship with things? This is Platonic philosophy. Last week we read something in Heidegger which said that Ideas are not just what we know, but Ideas bring into unhiddenness Reality. When we know an idea, it is knowing something which is itself a force of reality. The idea of the Good, says Plato, is the origin of things. The idea of the Good brings forth in nature proportionality, necessity, power, process, speciation, the web of life. What Is. The idea of the good brings out of nothing all the something that makes up existence.

Sri Aurobindo has a similar idea with the Supermind. It is the creative force of existence, energy, the Shakti, that contains the knowledge which brings into being what is. If we could get beyond mind, which is a reflection and analysis and representation in concepts and theories, into Supermind, we would come into direct contact with the creative energy of things themselves, and experience a continuum of infinite creativity, manifesting itself in time and space through forms that exist temporally. And the perception of temporal things would be full of the infinite energy of creativity behind them. And that would be a transformed consciousness. This is Sri Aurobindo's idea of the Supermind.

So Heidegger asks, what is an idea? "We need to recall the general meaning of the word 'idea', which means what is sighted. 'Idea' means something which is seen in a composite seeing. ...Sight is ambiguous – that which sees, sight, is that which sees, – and what it sees is sight. It has two meanings. Sight is the power of seeing and the power of self-showing." The blue shirt shows itself to our seeing, just like injustice

shows itself to our thinking. "Seeing is the seeing of a view, having a view of the sight that is seen. What binds the two together? This 'seeing' and 'sight' must be understood in a transposed meaning, rather than as sensory seeing with one's eyes. It is this sight that in perceiving first makes out something like a look, something present in such and such a way. What is retained in this transposed meaning is seeing as the perception of something in its self presentation."

So the self-presentation of the book is what we see. It is something in itself, and we see it. So, what is the relationship between this self presentation of the being of the idea of a book and our perception, our seeing, of the idea of the book in the object there? It is a relational field.

Comment: Doesn't this make it sound like the book is actively doing something to show itself?

Yes, it does and it is. There are light waves coming from the book towards you. And there is the energy of all that went into the making of the book that is contained in the object, also coming towards you. If you had read the book then what you see would be much more complex than what you see on the surface. There is its whole technological history and there are centuries of reflection contained in it. Without all of that the book would not be here.

Plato suggests that the soul, as Heidegger interprets Plato, is the whole relationship; it is the presencing of that which is seen, and it is the seeing of that which is presencing. Soul is not confined to the body; soul is in everything as what it is, and the knowing of what it is in us is possible because soul is the unifying seer of the unified seen.

Comment: It is Upanishadic.

~~~

These ideas of Heidegger are found in the book that is featured in this study, titled *The Essence of Truth*, in which we find Heidegger's

translation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. It was written in 1931, subsequent to *Being and Time*, and it is a very thorough treatment of Plato's theory of knowledge. If we compare this commentary on Plato's writings with some of the writings of Sri Aurobindo, we find remarkable connections. I would like for us to look briefly at one example, which is closely related to the arguments presented above, but which constitutes a leap away from epistemology, in the direction of metaphysics and spirituality.

Heidegger translates and comments on a passage from Plato's *Republic*, in the context of his explanation of the *noeton* and *gnoston*, the known and the direct grasp of the thing known, as follows:

'In the region of that which is genuinely and truly knowable, what is ultimately seen is the idea of the good. But it can be seen only with great difficulty, under great exertion.' The ascent into the light thus comes to an end. The *telos* (end), that which is ultimately seen is not grasped just as a finishing and going-no-further of something, but as the all encompassing, forming, determining *limit*. It is only here that liberation is brought to complete fruition as a becoming free *for*, a self-binding *to*, being. In the meantime we have come to see more clearly the inter-relation between liberation and unhiddenness, (*aletheia*, truth).

We thus come to the question of this ultimately perceivable idea, *idea tou agathou*, the idea of the good. What does the clarification of its essence tell us about the essence of *aletheia*, truth? ...The step from the idea, to the ultimately seeable idea, presupposes an adequate understanding of the essence of idea as such. We must already understand what 'idea' means, if we are to grasp the ultimate idea in its finality. Only in this way can we understand what is meant by *teleutaia idea*, the highest idea. And quite rightly because it is the ultimate step in an ascent.

...The idea is something highest, namely the most beingful being and the most unhidden being. The ideas are the most unhidden beings because they make being comprehensible, 'in whose light', as we still say today, a particular being is a *being* and is *what* it is. The ideas are also the most unhidden, i.e. the primordially unhidden, (in which



unhiddenness arises), in so far as they are what first lets beings show themselves. ...the highest idea holds sway most primordially and authentically by *allowing both the unhiddenness of beings to arise, and the being of beings to be understood.*

...The highest idea, although itself barely visible, is what makes possible both being and unhiddenness, i.e. it is what empowers *being* and *unhiddenness* (truth) as what they are. The highest idea, therefore, is this empowering (the Good), the empowering for being which as such gives itself simultaneously with the empowerment of *unhiddenness as occurrence.* (p. 68-72)

I have mentioned before that Sri Aurobindo and Heidegger share a background in Greek classical philosophy. In one of his early essays, *Ideals and Progress*, 1922, Sri Aurobindo wrote,

Ideals are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfill themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation. To the pragmatist intellect which takes its stand on the ever-changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities, they are at most potentialities of future truth and only become real when they are visible in the external fact as work of force accomplished. But to the mind which is able to draw back from the flux of force in the material universe, to the consciousness which is not imprisoned in its own workings or carried along in their flood but is able to envelop, hold and comprehend them,...the ideal present to its inner vision is a greater reality than the changing fact obvious to its outer senses. The Idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a reflection of the Idea which has created it.

This conception of idea, and especially the idea of the Good, as presented by Heidegger, and also by Sri Aurobindo, doesn't mean a 'mental conception'. In the Allegory of the Cave, *Aletheia*, as Unhiddenness, means that what we see at first, in the cave of ordinary consciousness, is shadow. What it really is, is hidden. Then, what we see when we stand up and turn around, is what has been reflected as shadow. Those are things, beings. Then, as we move up towards the light we begin to understand the theories of things, as what they are and

how they are. And then, as we look towards the being of things, as they stand in the light of the sun, which is blinding at first, we see the Idea, which is the most primordially unhidden true nature of the things themselves, which before only appeared to us as temporal relative perceptions. (In *Being and Time*, Heidegger presented an elaborate study of the relationship between the appearances of things and the phenomenon of the thing itself, the fundamental theory of phenomenology.)

What we see in this conception is three minds focusing on the meaning of the idea. What is behind this focusing of understanding, is a drive to ascend in knowledge towards truth. And this drive is the truth itself, in us, becoming revealed through our studies and contemplation, discovery and humiliation, and our eventual passing towards something other than a first perception and conception of things; towards an understanding that all those things we perceive, and understand theoretically, are the temporal forms of principles, or ideas, which are themselves eternal. When we perceive the eternal principles in beings, as what they really are, we are approaching the *gnoston*, the gnosis of the relative in relation to the absolute. And at the highest level of this understanding stands the Good, which is the idea that empowers both the being of beings and the knowing of the truth. In this vision of reality and interpretation of Plato's philosophy, Heidegger has established the ground of a fundamental *ontology*, which exceeds the limitations of the prevalent epistemology in philosophy, to establish the possibility of being conscious of things themselves as they truly are. For Sri Aurobindo, this approach to Truth has been tracked out through planes of consciousness above rational mind, through higher mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind, to Supermind, which is the original consciousness-force of being and truth.

Heidegger tells us that interpretation is a moving forward and backward between what is being known and knowing, the perceived and perceiving. Interpretation is the product of this moving backward and forward between the perceived and perceiving. An example can be found in an essential aspect of being, which we find in the world, called

delight. "The delightful is what arouses delight. It raises our spirits and puts us in good cheer. The attunedness which constantly and from the ground up penetrates our being could not be what it is had it not attuned our existence in advance to the delightfulness of the beings we encounter, and to delightfulness as such." Our being is attuned in advance to that which we discover as delight-full-ness, in this theory of perception.

"Only in so far as our being (Dasein) is attuned to this, and thus also attuned to the possibility of changes and shadings of attunement, thus only, in so far as delight and non-delight stand in the authentic striving of the soul, can we encounter the delightful as such. It is not as though we first find beings as present and then find that they are delightful. The situation is the reverse. What we encounter is already attuned in respect of delight and non-delight, or hovers between these as indeterminate. And only on the basis of this situation can we then disregard the character of delight/non-delight in order to look at what we encounter as something merely present."

Now, we don't have to believe this. But this is Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's philosophy of perception. This thinking leads us back to the original observation that we already understand the thing that we interpret by a kind of pre-modeling of what is. It already exists, in itself and in us; it is the nature of existence. "Something can strike us as delightful only in so far as our being, our Da-sein is already attuned to the delightfulness/non-delightfulness of what is present. Delightfulness/non-delightfulness, taken in the broad sense, thus belong to the region of perceivability that surrounds us in the sphere of our striving, just like sameness, difference, etc. What the Greeks call *agathon* and *kakon*, good and bad, belong in this same region, provided that these words are understood in the broadest possible sense."

Thus, we find in his interpretation of Plato's philosophy, perhaps the best indication of the meaning of Heidegger's fundamental identification of the essence of Being with the human being, in the term Da-sein, as "being-in-the-world". It is clear here that such a being is in

the world and of the world in such an intimate way that its being and the being of the world are one. This identity makes knowing the truth of things possible by direct intuition, if the various possibilities of distorted perception, false opinion, and the partial, temporal expression of things, etc., can be overcome in a unified non-sensory grasp of things in their unhiddenness and wholeness. The organ that is capable of such an intuition is the soul, which by definition “upholds the region of perceivability” by a kind of universality of being. And the nature of things in themselves can be thus known because they are in their essence expressions of the most knowable beings: ideas. The ultimate source of such a world, and of the empowerment of beings, both as what they are and as how they are known, is the idea of the Good.

We have also seen that Eros, according to Plato and Heidegger, is the force in existence that manifests the striving of the soul towards Being and Truth. “Striving is the way in which the soul holds being up before itself. An ‘inward having’ founded on striving whereby what we have, in that sense of having, we do not have in the sense of possessing.” There is a kind of striving to possess things that preoccupies the soul in ordinary life, and there is another kind of striving, for the being of things, which holds the object in a way that lets it come to itself, which at the same time gives us a sense of authentic self. This “having” is the opposite of the possession of things in order to dominate and manipulate them, whereby man loses his soul, says Heidegger.

For example, if we are seeking, or striving, to grasp the truth of Auroville, we may be able to perceive in various things and events a movement toward the realization of such an ideal community in which cultural diversity and human unity are in harmony. What we know, in this knowing, is the Idea, even when we simultaneously know its deficiencies and contradictions. We thus strive toward the true understanding of Auroville, which is a dynamic, a-temporal being, in relation to which everything that happens temporally can be understood. Or, similarly, we may observe the movement in America today against corporate dominance by a minority, as a result of the collapse of the stock market and the exploitation of the poorer 99% of the population, and see in that

movement of opposition the idea of the just society – which doesn't exist, but the idea that is perceived through these relationships reveals to us the truth of the society as it stands in its being. What then moves people to strive to possess the being of the just society, or to possess the (true) idea of Auroville? According to this Platonic theory, the human being is endowed with a soul that is pre-attuned by the being of certain realities which, by possessing them, comes to know and authentically possess the truth of itself.

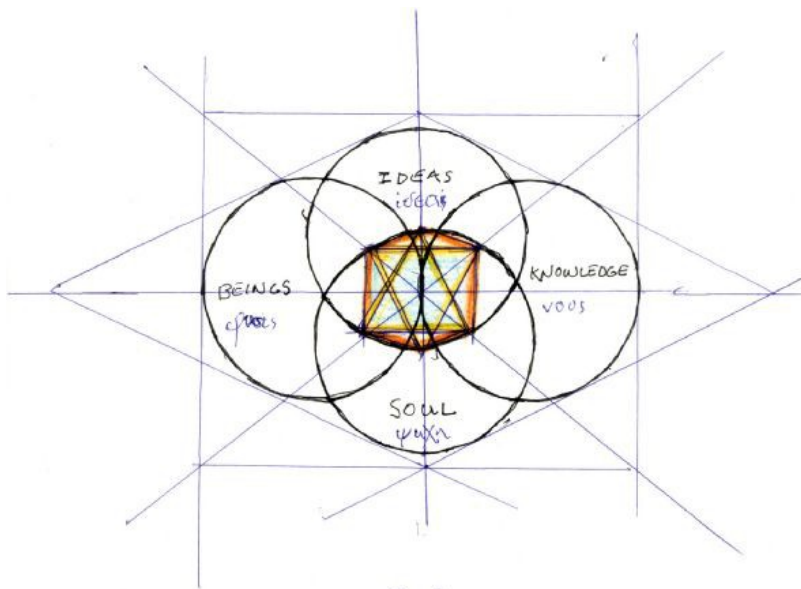
This process of authentic striving for knowledge and being is further elaborated by Heidegger, using Plato: "Goal directed seeing, striving seeing is fitting as a characterization of authentic striving. Striving for being is not blind impulse, but is a seeing striving which perceives, and has in view, that for which it strives. ...Again the question is: what is perceived and held in view in this way? Plato says: 'being' naturally, and indeed 'especially in regard to the inter-connection'. Why is the being-connected of the one to the other suddenly spoken of? ...Goodness, for example, is itself always the goodness *of* something *for* something, delightfulness likewise. Connectivity is not something additional, but belongs to the essential constitution of this being; it points to referential connections between the one and the other. The soul maintains such connections in view when it exists in its relationship to being."

*(Note: Essay was transcribed and adapted from the University of Human Unity lectures in Auroville presented on Octoberber 3, 10, 17 and 24, 2011)*

~~~

We may conclude by saying that these excerpts show that this work of Heidegger, which is based on the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, is a restatement of Platonic philosophy. As such it provides a key to Heidegger's philosophy as a whole, as well as to its connection with the 'gnostic' philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. In the first diagram below, which is an attempt to represent Heidegger's view of the world, we may see that the 'inner' and 'outer' circles of beings and knowledge, which are conventionally separated, are united by the 'upper' and 'lower' circles of ideas and soul; and the central oval unites all four circles. In the second

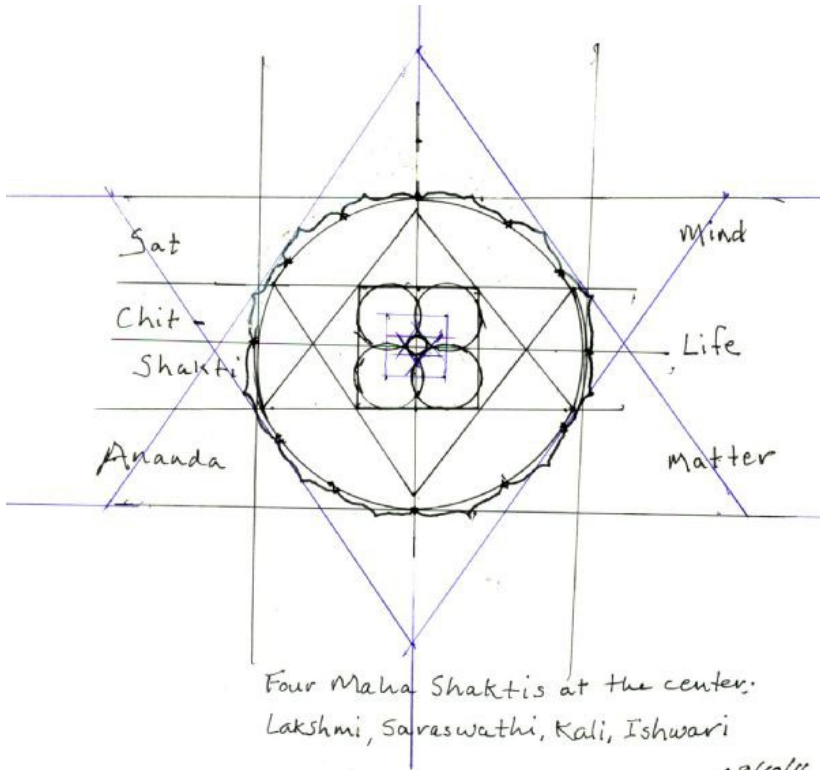
diagram, which is the formal symbol of Sri Aurobindo, we see the square of divine manifestation at the center of the ascending and descending triangles of consciousness, with the four powers of the Divine Shakti inside the square. We may surmise that what fundamentally differentiates Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo is the idea that this unification of being in the Truth-Consciousness is an evolutionary task, according to Sri Aurobindo, while for Heidegger it is the task of philosophy and, as such, is within the reach of human beings as they are, though requiring great effort. And yet, for him this marks the limit of metaphysics; empowerment of the Good is the end of philosophy. Perhaps the only difference is the stride beyond, taken by Sri Aurobindo.



οντοθεολογία

HEIDEGGER'S VIEW OF THE WORLD

25/10/2011



SRI AUROBINDO'S SYMBOL

29/10/11

SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

Mantra, Mythos, and the Mystic Hero's Journey

Prelude to a study of *Savitri*

From Sri Aurobindo's formulation of the theory of mantric poetry and its role in the transformation of consciousness (*The Future Poetry*, 1920) to Raimundo Pannikar's synthesis of Vedic and Christian spiritual traditions through his theory of *mythos* (*Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 1979), we see signs of the dissolution of barriers and the emergence of a global culture and spirituality which characterize modern civilization at its best. This was the theme of Sri Aurobindo's early work on the history of civilization (*The Human Cycle*, 1918) and of his prophecy that Indian spirituality would play an important role in such an emergence. For the past 100 years the tide of Eastern spirituality has duly flowed on Western shores, in myriad forms, to do its part for the envisioned change.

The establishment of the international educational township of Auroville in India in 1968, based on the hope and promise of the emergence of such a global consciousness, of human unity, and a further evolution of humanity and the earth, as formulated by Sri Aurobindo, is a signal tribute to the power of that vision which enlivened so much of Indian thought, social and political, artistic and spiritual, during the early part of the Twentieth Century, and which is still so essential to the successful future of ourselves and our planet, perhaps today more than ever before.

Sri Aurobindo has been the most prolific yogi-philosopher and seer-poet of the vision of human unity and spiritual evolution in this century, and perhaps his most significant legacy is the poem *Savitri*. It is the mantric embodiment of his Supramental Yoga, through which he sought the means of an eventual transformation of humanity and the world. To fully appreciate this accomplishment, we should remember that Sri

Aurobindo translated anew and commented at length upon the Vedic literature, and also wrote a sequel to Homer's Iliad in quantitative meter, in English, as steps in a serious poetic preparation for *Savitri*. Its poetry, its cadences and images and symbols are therefore classically rich and powerful. But its structure is spiritual: it is the mythos of the inner journey, the mystic struggle for light against darkness, the divine hero's conquest of death. And it is the revelatory vision of the Divine Mother, the *mahashakti*, by whose force and grace the work of spiritual transformation is done in us.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is more than masterful poetic composition, more than an epic rendering of the classical Indian mythos, however. It is the realization in English of that luminous quality of inspired vision and speech, called *mantra*, which can bring about in the hearer the processes of which it speaks. *Savitri* is the mantra, and the mythos, of the mystic hero's journey.

*O Sun-Word, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light
And bring down God into the lives of men*

Introduction: Sri Aurobindo's Methodology

"O Will, remember, that which was done remember!"

Let us remember that which was done, as the Upanishad suggests.

To understand Sri Aurobindo's work, it is appropriate I think, and perhaps necessary, to begin at the beginning, with the Upanishad, that settled inner knowledge with which he began, and which formed the foundation of his philosophy, his poetry, and his yoga.

Isha:

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid;
O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.
O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer,
O illumining Sun, O power of the
Father of creatures, marshal thy rays,

Draw together thy light;
The Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all,
That in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there,
He am I.

The Ishopanishad sings to us of the divine Self in all things and of the possibility of our life being a constant living of that experience, a constant “seeing” of the divine Truth.

Kena:

The name of That is “That Delight”; as That Delight
One should follow after It. He who so knows That,
Towards him verily all existences yearn.
Of this knowledge austerity and self-conquest and works
Are the foundation, the Vedas are all its limbs,
Truth is its dwelling place.
He who knows this knowledge, smites evil away from him
And in that vast world and infinite heaven
Finds his foundation,
Yea, he finds his foundation.
Thou hast said “Speak to me Upanishad”,
Spoken to thee is Upanishad.
Of the Eternal verily is the Upanishad
That we have spoken.

Kenopanishad sings to us of the way to that inner knowledge by which we transcend even the godheads of mind and life to achieve conscious identity with the Brahman, the Absolute, the Divine, Eternal Delight.

Sri Aurobindo commented often on these Upanishads in his early writings, on their meaning, their language, their importance, and on his method of interpretation. And they became the basis of his philosophy of *The Life Divine*. He said, most interestingly for us I think:

I hold firmly the belief that the truths of the Upanishads were not arrived at by intellectual speculation, cannot be interpreted by disputation... I hold them to have been arrived at by revelation and spiritual experience, to be records of things seen, heard and felt in the

soul...These supra-intellectual faculties by which the *rishis* received the Veda and developed its implications, *drsti*, *sruti* and *smrti*, are also the only means by which their thoughts can be perfectly understood.

My method does not allow me to deal with the language of the Upanishad in the spirit of the scholar, – not the pride of the Pandit dealing with words as he chooses, but the humility of the seeker after truth in the presence of its masters is, I have thought, the proper attitude of the exegete.

I have also held it as a rule of sound interpretation that any apparent incoherence, any want of logical relation and succession of thought in the text must exist by deficiency of understanding and not in the seer's deficiency of thinking.

But if a man can make his mind like a blank slate, if he can enter into the condition of bottomless passivity proper to the state of the calm all-embracing Chaitanya Atma, not attempting to fix what the Truth shall be but allowing Truth to manifest herself in his soul, he will find that then it is the nature of the *Sruti* to reveal perfectly its own message. (*Supplement*, 1971, p. 302)

This is a demanding hermeneutical exercise, as no doubt we can all agree. *Drsti*...*Sruti*...*Smrti*...But it can also lead to much much more than exegesis, as I hope we shall see, as we humbly consider Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* – Mantra, Mythos, and the Mystic Hero's Journey.

Mantra

Sri Aurobindo's theory of *mantra* was expounded in a full length work titled *The Future Poetry* which was published serially in his monthly magazine *Arya* along with his other major philosophical works between 1914 and 1922.

It is not my intention to analyse the theory here, but to be faithful to the hermeneutic that he employed to arrive at the theory. I wish only to present it in his words as a background to an eventual interpretive presentation of the poem *Savitri*, in which I believe Sri Aurobindo carries out the project he envisioned early in this century of a future mantric poetry in English. He said:

What the Vedic poets meant by the Mantra was an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm, *chandās*. For the seeing could not be separated from the hearing; it was one act. Nor could the living of the truth in oneself which we mean by realisation, be separated from either, for the presence of it in the soul and its possession of the mind must precede or accompany in the creator or human channel that expression of the inner sight and hearing which takes the shape of the luminous word.

The Mantra is born through the heart and shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of that godhead of the Eternal of whom the truth seen is a face or a form. And in the mind too of the fit outward hearer who listens to the word of the poet-seer, these three must come together, if our word is a real Mantra; the sight of the inmost truth must accompany the hearing, the possession of the inmost spirit of it by the mind and its coming home to the soul must accompany or follow immediately upon the rhythmic message of the Word and the mind's sight of the Truth.

The idea of the poet who is also the Rishi has made again its appearance. Only a wider spreading of the thought and mentality in which that idea can live and the growth of an accomplished art of poetry in which it can take body, are still needed to give the force of permanence to what is now only an incipient and just emerging power. the attempt itself would be a rejuvenating elixir and put the poetic spirit once more in the shining front of the powers and guides of the ever-progressing soul of humanity. There it will lead in the journey like the Vedic Agni, the fiery giver of the word, *yuva kavīh, priyo atithir amartyo mandrajihvah rtacit, rtava*, the Youth, the Seer, the beloved and immortal Guest with his honied tongue of ecstasy, the Truth-conscious, the Truth-finder, born as a flame from earth and yet the heavenly messenger of the Immortals. (*The Future Poetry*, 1971, p.199-208)

Is *Savitri* that new poetry of which he spoke, the embodiment of that flame-word which shall lead the earth-soul to light? Certainly there are many indications in his letters that Sri Aurobindo intended it to be so. He

worked on the poem for the next thirty years of his life and made it the record of his yoga of transformation. But perhaps the truth cannot be found in the telling, but only in the hearing. And more, as he indicated in a letter on *Savitri*: "The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the reader to understand or not understand... A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the recipient as well as in the writer."

Mythos

The story of Savitri, as we know, is a myth of the conquest of death. Its origins are at least as old as the Vedas and along with the Vedas, it enjoyed a major rebirth in the works of Vyasa, whose great synthesis was the Bhagavad Gita. But the myth, as transmitted to us through Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, also finds its roots in the Kathopanishad.

Katha:

When every desire that finds lodging in the heart of man,
Has been loosened from its moorings,
Then this mortal puts on immortality;
Even here he tastes God, in this human body.
Yea when all the strings of the heart are rent asunder,
Even here, in this human birth,
Then the mortal becomes immortal.
This is the whole teaching of the Scriptures.
Thus did Nachiketas with Death for his teacher
Win the God-knowledge:
He learned likewise the whole ordinance of Yoga:
Thereafter he obtained God and became void of death.
So shall another be who comes likewise to the
Science of the Spirit.

Through his interpretive wisdom and yogic application of the principles and processes of the Upanishads – the silence of the mind, the quiescence of the emotional being, the stillness of the body – the

experience of the one Self in all, Sri Aurobindo discovered a way not only to the spiritual immortality which is the “whole teaching of the Scriptures,” but to the descent of that divine Consciousness-Force into the body and its eventual divinization of matter. He discovered another potential, a new evolution – beyond spiritualized mind and life. He called it the Supramental Truth-Force, as yet unmanifest here, the supramental Mahashakti. And She took the form for him of a particularly luminous and powerful being, descending through the planes of consciousness, opening the way for a wholly new, luminous and powerful, undreamed possibility for the earth. The symbol for that new possibility, that luminous force of transformation and its power to conquer death, its word of Truth, is Savitri.

This is the “legein” of the myth, the story, as Prof. Pannikar’s hermeneutics would tell us. The “mythos” is Savitri herself, the living symbol which stimulates in us the ability to see its reality, her vibrant presence and its pathos, and to identify with its movement in us. That is the essence of Mantra.

Now let us try to hear her, as he intended that we should.

(Author’s Note: The text contained in the foregoing Mantra and Mythos portions was first given as a lecture presentation at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1993. Excerpts were also read in the mantric style from several cantos of *Savitri: The Yoga of the King, Adoration of the divine Mother, Search for the Soul, and The Eternal Day.*)

The Journey

Everything depends on the Word. For it is the word of creation, the very sound that brings to birth the worlds, the luminous goddess-form of the Supreme:

Om tat savitur varam rupam jyotih parasya dhimahi yannah
satyena dipayet. ¹

¹ Sri Aurobindo’s translation, cf SABCL, Vol.26, p.513: Let us meditate on the most auspicious form of Savitri, on the light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the

and it shall illumine us with the Truth. For as Sri Aurobindo affirms often enough in *Savitri*, “She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire...She is the Force, the inevitable Word.”

It is arguable, perhaps, – the seer having received this boon of Drsti, Sruti, Smrti in a clairaudiant trance, as the simultaneous inevitable revelation of the truth of his realization, thence to be delivered forth by him as mantric verse for the subsequent illumination of fit hearers – that this sacred word might best be read, and received, by the listening heart of a clairaudiant silence. And for those gifted with clairaudience (as we know from Sri Aurobindo’s diaries that he was) and disposed to receiving the supramental revelation, this might well be true. But Sri Aurobindo’s theory of mantra, the text of *Savitri* itself, and our experience, seem to support rather emphatically the notion that it is the audible sound, with its dynamics of pitch, rhythm, image, and conceptual spiritual content that has a unique potential and power to effect in the fit outward hearer the experience of which it speaks, and of which it is the living Symbol.²

It is to demonstrate the truth of this hypothesis, at least in part, that we have undertaken the *Savitri/Agenda* experiment – a series of immersion workshops in which we simply allow the Word to be heard and absorbed, in as clear and deep a manner as we can manage at the present time.³ And in the context and atmosphere thus created by *Savitri*, we turn to the Mother’s Agenda with the aspiration to hear and know as profoundly and intimately as possible her experience of transformation. The effect of this attempt thus far has been overwhelmingly gratifying. And it has made dramatically clear the fact that the experience of transformation narrated by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* and by the Mother in her *Agenda* are one and the same. The two together create a resonance that seems to literally dissolve the

Truth.

² See previous section for a summary of Sri Aurobindo’s theory of mantra.

³ These one-week workshops have taken place primarily at Savitri Solar Dome in the Baca, Crestone, Colorado, in August 94 and March 95, August 95-99 (AUM Conference).

membrane that separates our worlds and unite us with them in a remarkably vivid and tangible sense.

This of course will not seem too surprising to those who are familiar with their work. But what can be surprising is the degree to which one finds oneself brought face to face with their experience and into a deeply luminous identity with Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and the work of transformation. And that of course is the point, whatever else may be said.

It is tempting, however, to take this a step further, or in fact several steps further, – to grasp the extraordinary quality of the experience in its total reality, and somehow establish its importance on solid ground for ourselves and for any who might wish to pursue such a process, enter the worlds of Savitri and Satyavan with eyes open, and as the Upanishad says, “to truly find our foundation.” And yet, perhaps it is only the experience itself that can achieve these goals, which certainly exceed anything that mind as we know it can analyse. Its validity is to be found only in the revelation itself, which proceeds from the Truth. And this finding is the process that *Savitri* narrates and establishes in us. She is the supramental force as She issues forth in goddess-form from the Divine Mother, as She descends into the consciousness and speech of the supramental Avatar, as She enwraps the subtle body of the Earth and takes physical birth in the body of the Mother, to reveal the soul and tapasya of the transformation of Death and the evolution of immortal life, and as She enters our space in the form of mantric vibration. One must simply become a channel for the sound that is Savitri and receive Her without reservation.

There are innumerable instances in *Savitri* that illustrate, comment upon, and reveal this truth. Perhaps a negative argument in support of this notion can be made at this point, bearing in mind that the written page is dumb, and the only real proof is in the hearing. To attempt an example, nonetheless, let us look at the first few lines of the canto titled The Adoration of the Divine Mother:

A stillness absolute, incommunicable,

Meets the sheer self-discovery of the soul;
A wall of stillness shuts it from the world,
A gulf of stillness swallows up the sense
And makes unreal all that mind has known,
All that the labouring senses still would weave
Prolonging an imaged unreality. (*Savitri*, III.II.310)

I don't know how one can have the experience of the elongation of the "All" in next to the last line, and then of the lengthening, deepening and slowing of sound that occurs with "still would weave," culminating in the extremely elongated and heavy "Prolonging," which qualifies in an indescribably accurate way the essence of the final term "unreality," without reading these lines aloud, instrumentally. The net result of reading instrumentally is to invite that stillness absolute into the spaces we are so accustomed to being filled with sensational unrealities. And that experience of stillness is a prerequisite of all that follows. It is not difficult to understand this conceptually; it is fundamental to most spiritual discipline. But Savitri has the power to actually bring about such an emptiness and stillness, instantaneously, deeper than meditation usually can achieve even with considerable effort. And then we are prepared for the uplift that follows:

But where is the Lover's everlasting Yes,
And immortality in the secret heart,
The voice that chants to the creator Fire,
The symbolled OM, the great assenting Word,
The bridge between the rapture and the calm,
The passion and the beauty of the Bride,
The chamber where the glorious enemies kiss,
The smile that saves, the golden peak of things? (*Savitri*, III.II.310-11)

I know that "the golden peak of things" has a golden ring when read aloud that heightens the vibration of the whole being; that "the rapture" and "the calm" are audibly, experientially distant from each other on the spectrum of spiritual qualities and require a special bridging influence that only the swift, delicate force of Savitri can accomplish and reveal in

an instant of perception; and that “the chamber where the glorious enemies kiss” is the chamber of the body when it is filled with the absolute powers of Love and Death, because these qualities are conveyed to me directly by the sound on which they arrive into audible space. I do not get the same sense of these words when I read them silently or reservedly. And when this section ends it conveys a power and dynamism that cannot sit silently on the page:

In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power.
Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul
And in the ray reveal the parent sun:
It can make the world a vessel of Spirit’s force,
It can fashion in the clay God’s perfect shape. (*Savitri*, III.II.311-12)

This is not merely a prophetic statement. This is precisely where Savitri reveals her true potential. She is the power that can suddenly awaken us and make our clay feel like a vessel of God because She pours that radiant substance into us and into the space around us that is filled with Her sound and substance. (“This known as in a thunder-flash of God, The rapture of things eternal filled his limbs; Amazement fell upon his ravished sense; His spirit was caught in her intolerant flame.”) She IS the stillness and the word, She IS the sweetness and the might that characterize the supramental atmosphere and being and power in this modified mantric form.

And the extent of both Her sweetness and Her might are conveyed, mystically, powerfully, and undeniably home to the soul who hears, by Her dynamic, physical embodiment in sound. That this is the intention of Sri Aurobindo’s verse is made overtly apparent when, in a closely related canto a few pages on in this same book, titled *The Vision and the Boon*, after a long and grievous, heroic chant of invocation to the Divine Mother to heal all this chaos, in which the might of the great Aswapathy becomes difficult for us to contain and to bear, the Mother answers him in the most incredibly sweet and melifluous tones, with an affirmation and description of the one whom she shall send to accomplish what he has asked:

One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power...

A music of griefless things shall weave her charm;
The harps of the Perfect shall attune her voice,
The streams of Heaven shall murmur in her laugh,
Her lips shall be the honeycombs of God,
Her limbs his golden jars of ecstasy, ... (*Savitri*, III.IV.346)

Let us only say here, in closing, that to hear these lines in the continuous natural succession in which they occur, in their circumambience of light and sound, is to experience those streams, that laugh, and to taste that honey with those lips. When, later on, She takes birth and becomes conscious on Earth, finds Her human counterpart and thus becomes mortal, subject to the vicissitudes of matter and life and mind, and rises to Her full stature in Him at the moment of his death, we know that She is the soul of this yoga, that She is there to do this work in us, that She was the consciousness in that body at that moment of death to accomplish the work She was sent to do, and that She will always be so, forevermore. For we have heard, and this is the divine truth-force, Savitri:

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will. (*Savitri*, III.IV.346)

As Mother says in the *Agenda* in 1961:

But all of that is wonderfully, accurately expressed and explained in *Savitri*. Only you must know how to read it! The entire last part, from the moment she goes to seek Satyavan in the realm of Death (which affords an occasion to explain this), the whole description of what happens there, right up to the end, where every possible offer is made to tempt her, everything she must refuse to continue her terrestrial labor ... it is my experience EXACTLY.

Savitri is really a condensation, a concentration of the universal Mother – the eternal universal Mother, Mother of all universes from all eternity – in an earthly personality for the Earth's salvation. And

Satyavan is the soul of the Earth, the Earth's *jiva*. So when the Lord says, 'he whom you love and whom you have chosen', it means the earth. All the details are there! When she comes back down, when Death has yielded at last, when all has been settled and the Supreme tells her, 'Go, go with him, the one you have chosen,' how does Sri Aurobindo describe it? He says that she very carefully takes the SOUL of Satyavan into her arms, like a little child, to pass through all the realms and come back down to earth. Everything is there! He hasn't forgotten a single detail to make it easy to understand – for someone who knows how to understand. And it is when Savitri reaches the earth that Satyavan regains his full human stature. ⁴

As a flame disappears in endless Light
Immortally extinguished in its source,
Vanished the splendour and was stilled the word ...

Then a line moved on the far edge of calm:
The warm-lipped sentient soft terrestrial wave,
A quick and many-murmured moan and laugh,
Came gliding in upon white feet of sound. (*Savitri*, III.IV.346-47)

⁴This conversation (Vol. 2, p.37) immediately precedes the one of January 24, 1961, in which the Mother describes the descent of the supramental consciousness into her body. It is a perfect complement to The Vision and the Boon.

The Logic of the Infinite

I would like to focus for a moment on a distinction that Sri Aurobindo emphasizes with respect to knowledge and method. And I would like to do this in the context of some aspects of contemporary thought regarding paradigm shift.

When Seyril Schochen first spoke to me a few months ago about giving this talk, because Devan Nair who usually comes here to do this wasn't able to be with us this year, I thought of the title 'The Logic of the Infinite and the Language of Light – A Paradigm for the Third Millennium.' A rather ambitious undertaking, no doubt, but a millennium is a long time, and a paradigm for the third millennium could very well be the logic of the infinite and the language of light.

I was actually thinking of this because of an article that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* of April (1998), called 'The Biological Basis of Morality' by Edward O. Wilson. Professor Wilson is a Harvard biologist who has written several fascinating books about biodiversity and the ecological crises of the earth. But in this article, he said that what we face now is a battle for the soul of humanity, between empirical knowledge and the belief that there might be a transcendental source of knowledge. And his extraordinary assertion was that only empirical knowledge is reliable.

I would like to pose a counter argument, based on the transcendental point of view, in a rather substantive way, if I can.

I looked back at some of the scientific writing of the day that I felt most likely to be on the right track – the most enlightened scientific writing of the day that I was aware of. I looked at the *Web of Life* by Fritz Capra. I looked at *The Presence of the Past* by Rupert Sheldrake. And I looked at *Consciousness Explained* by Daniel Dennett. And each of these writers is, I think, very respectable. I do have a degree in philosophy and I did spend a lot of time on that endeavor. I had read these experts before, and I have read Aristotle. So I looked back at the notion of empirical knowledge and where it has led us, from the point of view of the

scientists that I felt to be the most reliable.

And as you must know, because we are all in this intellectual environment, and thought is quite a common pattern of energy that we share, we have all grown up in this milieu of thought, – and as Sheldrake says, the notion that the cosmos is an evolving entity, rather than something stable, fixed, and determined by unchangeable laws, has only been entertained by physicists since the sixties of this century. But in fact, nowadays, physicists in general, who are attuned to the paradigm, believe that the cosmos is an evolving entity.

Capra has formulated, or has attempted a recent formulation of, a unified theory of mind and life, which says that even bacteria and slightly more complex cellular life forms, are constantly making choices between good and evil. They are constantly looking ahead to anticipate their future, so that they couple with something that's going to be good for them as opposed to getting in the vicinity of something that isn't going to be good for them. And so, this very characteristic aspect of consciousness, anticipation of the future, is a characteristic of the simplest forms of life. The physicists, like Capra, and the biologists, like Sheldrake, believe therefore that consciousness is life – as Sri Aurobindo always said.

Matter is Life is Mind is Spirit.

So imagine for a moment, your self, ourselves, starting with what we identify with as ourself – the whole thing, our whole self. And then, think about the body and its organs, your brain, your heart, your bones and muscles and cells. And then think about the molecules that comprise the cellular level of who you are. Then think about the fields of energy and quanta of matter that form the basis of those cells. The elements, the energy fields, that constitute that whole self, are in exactly the same proportion to each other in our body as they are in the sun. The whole spectrum.

When you build back up from the bottom, from that sub-microscopic level, those structures – on the basis of what is known about those

structures – the functioning of the molecules can't be determined or predicted. Capra and Sheldrake and company all agree. Even Drs. Wilson and Dennett agree. And the functioning of those molecules, and those cells – as much as is understood about them – can't be used to predict how those cells work in the structures known as organs, and what they do and why they do it. And the operation of the cells and the organs – as much as is understood about them – can't be the basis of any prediction or creation with respect to our sophisticated ability to synthesize complex notions and move towards the future on the basis of those syntheses, such as we heard yesterday, for example, in our study of The Natural Step theory of economics.

We can analyze each of those levels of structure that is enfolded in the next, from the top down. But we can't, science can't, build from that base back up. It doesn't know anything about the links between the levels. It only knows that they are levels of structure with special functions, within each other.

It's like, that whole system of structures, which are self-replicating at every level, through processes at every level, creates that pattern at each level which ultimately is the pattern that you understand to be yourself, and ourselves, and on out to the cosmos. It's like, the hardware through which the pattern, the program, is run. But where the program comes from, or what its nature is, is only understood through the pattern, as far as the empirical process is able to understand it.

But there is another process of understanding. And as all of these structures continue to evolve, that other process of understanding will become progressively more common and manifest. And it's possible to see that in advance, because of principles of conscious evolution that empirical science is only beginning to guess might be there, – like the implicate order that unfolds in the explicate order. It's a very beautiful theory, but there is no hard evidence to support it.

Sri Aurobindo, in a later section of *The Life Divine*, revised around 1939, while *Savitri* was also being written, wrote:

There is a supreme reality, eternal, absolute, and infinite. Because it

is absolute and infinite, it is in its essence indeterminable. It is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining mind. It is ineffable by a mind created speech. It is describable neither by our negations, for we cannot limit it by saying it is not this, it is not that – nor by our affirmations, for we cannot fix it by saying it is this, it is that. And yet, though in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and in every way unknowable. It is self-evident to itself. And although inexpressible yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity, of which the spiritual being in us must be capable. For that spiritual being is in its essence and its original and ultimate reality, not other than this supreme existence. But although thus indeterminable to mind because of its absoluteness and infinity, we discover that this supreme and eternal infinite determines itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths of its being, which are beyond the universe, and in it, and are the very foundations of its existence. These truths present themselves to our conceptual cognition, as the fundamental aspects in which we see and experience the omnipresent reality.

In themselves, they are seen directly, not by intellectual understanding, but by a spiritual intuition, a spiritual experience in the very substance of our consciousness. But they can also be caught at in conception by a large and plastic idea, and can be expressed in some sort by a plastic speech which does not insist too much on rigid definition, or limit the wideness and subtlety of the idea. In order to express this experience or this idea, with any nearness, a language has to be created, which is at once intuitively metaphysical and revealingly poetic, admitting significant and living images as the vehicle of a close, suggestive and vivid indication, a language such as we find hammered out into a subtle and pregnant massiveness in the Veda and the Upanishads. (1949, p.292-293)

I have dealt with the idea of that language in the paper on *Savitri*, titled 'Mantra, Mythos, and the Mystic Hero's Journey'.

Sri Aurobindo then goes on to say: "If it is to be of real service, the intellect must consent to pass out of the bounds of a finite logic, and accustom itself to the logic of the infinite."

There are several more pages in which Sri Aurobindo describes the functioning of the logical mind and its pros and cons. Then, towards the

end of the section he says,

To understand truly the world process of the infinite and the time process of the eternal, the consciousness must pass beyond this finite reason and the finite sense, to a larger reason and spiritual sense, in touch with the consciousness of the infinite, and responsive to the logic of the infinite, which is the very logic of Being itself, and arises inevitably from its self-operation of its own realities, a logic whose consequence, whose sequences, are the steps not of thought but the steps of existence.

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo has achieved, with considerable intention, a language like that of the Upanishads, which is meant to bypass the mind and create a channel, a very direct, intimate channel, from the Overmind to the heart, for the Supramental force of being and consciousness to enter and begin building in us the structures, the processes, and the patterns, of that next step of existence.

Savitri is therefore an instrument that we have been given. I would like to read from it now, from a highly autobiographical canto, 'The Yoga of the King' in which we are clearly shown the driving motivation of his Yoga, and from the following canto, in which we find elements of the argument that I have just laid out, called 'The World Stair', in which Sri Aurobindo makes a very explicit statement about the nature of consciousness. He offers an explanation of consciousness, a vision of its structure and its evolutionary process, which makes it possible for us to know, vividly and intimately, something of that next step of existence.

Book I, Canto V:

A Will, a hope immense now seized his heart,
And to discern the superhuman's form
He raised his eyes to unseen spiritual heights,
Aspiring to bring down a greater world.
The glory he had glimpsed must be his home.
A brighter heavenlier sun must soon illumine
This dusk room with its dark internal stair,
The infant soul in its small nursery school
Mid objects meant for a lesson hardly learned

Outgrow its early grammar of intellect
And its imitation of Earth-Nature's art,
Its earthly dialect to God-language change,
In living symbols study Reality
And learn the logic of the Infinite.
The Ideal must be Nature's common truth,
The body illumined with the indwelling God,
The heart and mind feel one with all that is,
A conscious soul live in a conscious world. (76-77)

Book II, Canto I:

There walled apart by its own innerness
In a mystical barrage of dynamic light
He saw a lone immense high-curved world-pile
Motionless under an inscrutable sky.
As if from matter's plinth and viewless base
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;
It hoped to soar into the Ineffable's reign:
A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown. ... (98)

Amid the many systems of the One
Made by an interpreting creative joy
Alone it points us to our journey back
Out of our long self-loss in nature's deeps;
Planted on earth it holds in it all realms:
It is a brief compendium of the Vast.
This was the single stair to being's goal.
A summary of the stages of the spirit,
Its copy of the cosmic hierarchies
Refashioned in our secret air of self
A subtle pattern of the universe.
It is within, below, without, above.
Acting upon this visible Nature's scheme
It wakens our earth-matter's heavy doze

To think and feel and to react to joy;
It models in us our diviner parts,
Lifts mortal mind into a greater air,
Makes yearn this life of flesh to intangible aims,
Links the body's death with immortality's call:
Out of the swoon of the Inconscience
It labours towards a superconscient Light.
If earth were all and this were not in her,
Thought could not be nor life-delight's response:
Only material forms could then be her guests
Driven by an inanimate world-force.
Earth by this golden superfluity
Bore thinking man and more than man shall bear;
This higher scheme of being is our cause
And holds the key to our ascending fate;
It calls out of our dense mortality
The conscious spirit nursed in Matter's house. (98-99)

(Author's note: This essay is from a talk given at Savitri Solar Dome in Crestone, Colorado, 8/15/98)

Empirical Consilience and Transcendental Conciliation

Introduction

Edward O. Wilson is a prominent professor of biology at Harvard University and the author of *The Diversity of Life* (1992), a remarkable study in neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, which includes a thoroughly amazing account of the phenomenon of species diversity, on whose intricate web the life of the biosphere depends, and an important treatment of the massive extinction event in which our species currently finds itself involved, as its primary cause. At the end of the book, in a chapter titled *The Environmental Ethic*, Wilson writes:

Humanity is a part of nature, a species that evolved among other species. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to discover the sources of human sensibility and acquire the knowledge on which an enduring ethic, a sense of preferred direction can be built. ...For what, in the final analysis, is morality but the command of conscience seasoned by a rational examination of consequences? And what is a fundamental precept but one that serves all generations? An enduring environmental ethic will aim to preserve not only the health and freedom of our species, but access to the world in which the human spirit was born.

As the dramatic conclusion to this monumental work, after a detailed discussion of the destruction of the biosphere that is taking place, Professor Wilson clearly expresses grave concern about the future prospects of life on earth, and of the human species on whose choices that future depends. This concern has since been carried forward and elaborated in an article featured in *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1998), titled "The Biological Basis of Morality." Here Wilson's focus is on the origin and nature of ethical behavior, and the question whether humanity will be able to make the difficult choices that are now upon it. It is undoubtedly a troubling question, and one that is made no less so

by the problems that seem to be inherent in Wilson's argument. In short, he successfully opens a can of philosophical worms.

At the start, he poses this disjunctive proposition: "Either ethical principles, such as justice and human rights, are independent of human experience, or they are human inventions." The question of fundamental importance for him at this point is whether we believe that ethical principles have a transcendental origin, or else are the product of biological and cultural evolution, and can be empirically explained. One of these two beliefs must be false, he thinks, and the choice when made, or the truth finally known, "makes all the difference in the way we view ourselves as a species" and "determines the conduct of moral reasoning." There is no middle term or possibility for him. And as an empiricist, there is the further complication that in his view only the empirical choice, and its general acceptance, can ultimately enable our species to solve the big problems.

I would like to review Wilson's arguments in some detail, and to determine, if possible, how he reaches his conclusions, whether they are justified, and what the implications might be for humanity – undoubtedly the real thrust of his concern, as well it should be. And in order to give a balanced view of the problems raised, I will use statements from Sri Aurobindo's major philosophical treatise *The Life Divine* (1949), in which he discusses many of the same issues from the transcendentalist position.

First Paradox

In "The Biological Basis of Morality," Prof. Wilson tells us that the moral reasoning in modern society is a mess because "Both ethics and political science lack a foundation of veritable knowledge of human nature sufficient to produce cause-and-effect predictions and sound judgments based on them." At its best, moral reasoning has produced precepts, such as those enshrined in the Ten Commandments of Judaism by Moses and the Declaration of Independence by Jefferson, which reflect patterns of behavior, structures of social organization, and values

selected through many cycles of tribal and prehistoric evolution. These patterns and structures now have an ingrained genetic basis but questionable long term value and only limited effectiveness in the conditions of modern society. They have become outdated and rigid, in many cases, and moreover, they derive their authority from transcendental beliefs in either divine or natural law, which are supposedly independent of any kind of natural, material origins in heredity and evolution.

The empiricist's position is that such transcendental assumptions are necessarily false. Therefore, they can't provide a sound basis for moral authority. Only on the basis of a thorough understanding of heredity and brain science, says Wilson, can a wise and stable system of moral imperatives be constructed, capable of achieving a widespread consensus. His dilemma, however, is that even though he believes there is evidence that traditional ethical and religious values are the products of genetic evolution, and behavior patterns such as dominance hierarchies, injunctions governing adultery, and rituals leading to mystical communion with the whole, have been favored by evolution, they are susceptible to exploitation, abuse, and injustice. Yet modern biological science still does not have the depth of knowledge and understanding to override the underlying mechanisms of a long evolutionary history. Nor does it have the credibility to do so, as yet. "The human mind evolved to believe in gods. It did not evolve to believe in biology. Acceptance of the supernatural conveyed a great advantage throughout prehistory, when the brain was evolving. Thus it is in sharp contrast to the science of biology, which was developed as a product of the modern age, and is not underwritten by genetic algorithms." Empirical science could do a better job of setting things right but it has first to overcome eons of evolution that have produced society as we know it and transcendental forms of ethical belief.

Second Paradox

Prof. Wilson clearly believes that genetic predisposition in human nature

somehow gets transported epigenetically into moral precepts, and eventually into laws and divine proclamations. Transcendentalists, however, believe that moral reasoning is independent of such processes, which is one of Wilson's chief concerns. Philosophers of a secular rather than religious predisposition, such as Plato and Kant, have said that moral imperatives are the product of higher mental faculties of intuition, reasoning, and critical judgment, exercised by a mind predisposed to arrive at truth by the very nature of reality. Wilson's response is, "Ethical precepts are very unlikely to be ethereal messages awaiting revelation, or independent truths vibrating in a nonmaterial dimension of the mind."

The process of arriving at ethical precepts in his view starts with basic instincts such as to cooperate or to defect. He gives examples in pack behavior at the animal level, then at the level of primitive tribal organization, and on up to more sophisticated levels of social organization such as religions, armies, and one might suppose, even science departments in big universities. To associate and accept, or to dissociate and reject are the basic drives that lead to long term success for the individual, family, and society. Through the long journey of history these drives bring us eventually to the development of such emotions and moral sentiments as "empathy, humility, shame, and moral outrage," which in turn "bias cultural evolution toward moral codes of honor, patriotism, altruism, compassion," etc. Such emergent qualities and values of human psychology are further abstracted into ethical precepts, and ultimately form the basis of moral judgments that are brought to bear in general on human conduct.

How this epigenetic process works to transform instincts into ethical concepts over time, and how resultant changes in behavior get translated back into the genetic codes of later generations, of course remains a mystery. The notion that these transformations take place up and down the ladder of genetic, morphological, and sociological phenomena is based on empirical observation, inference, association, and analogy.

As Sri Aurobindo characterizes this enigma in *The Life Divine* (p.272), "We know that genes and chromosomes are the cause of hereditary transmissions, not only of physical but of psychological variations; but we do not discover how psychological characteristics can be contained and transmitted in this inconscient material vehicle. We do not see or know, but it is expounded to us as a cogent account of Nature-process, that a play of electrons, of atoms and their resultant molecules, of cells, glands, chemical secretions and physiological processes manages by their activity on the nerves and brain of a Shakespeare or a Plato to produce or could be perhaps the dynamic occasion for the production of a *Hamlet* or a *Symposium* or a *Republic*. ...The divergence here of the determinants and the determination becomes so wide that we are no longer able to follow the process." These are the very mysteries that Wilson is convinced empirical science will eventually explain, and when it does it will be able to establish wiser and more stable guidelines for human behavior than transcendental ethical thought has yet been able to do. And yet that very type of thought is the fullest fruit of evolution, and the architect and poet of the great legal and religious systems of civilization.

Third Paradox

It is a curious coincidence, and one that tweaked my interest in his article, that Prof. Wilson begins "The Biological Basis of Morality" with a reference to the term "consilience" which he defines as "the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines," defined elsewhere as "the accordance of inductions from different phenomena." This is his basic criterion for empirical truth. The material origin of ethics meets this criterion, he says, because "causal explanations of brain activity and evolution, while imperfect, already cover most facts known about behavior we term moral." A transcendental proposition, on the other hand, such as "We hold these truths to be self-evident...", he points to as lacking independent biological explanations that jump up consiliently as reinforcements all around. And yet he says that, "Ritual and prayer permit religious believers to be in direct touch with the Supreme Being,

...the unexplainable is explained; and an oceanic sense of communion with the larger whole is made possible. ...Perhaps, as I believe, these phenomena can all eventually be explained as functions of brain circuitry and deep genetic history." But that belief does not prevent Prof. Wilson from acknowledging, with a sort of self-contradictory respect, the power, grandeur, and possible truth of the elder contender for authority: "To call religion instinctive is not to suppose that any particular part of its mythos is untrue – only that its sources run deeper than ordinary habit and are in fact hereditary."

In a chapter of *The Life Divine* (p.302), Sri Aurobindo uses a similar but different term to qualify the transcendentalist's criterion for truth: "conciliation". Conciliation is defined as "the reconciliation of discrepant theories." In introducing a discussion of the origin (determination) of qualities (determinants) in human nature, such as courage, or healing properties in a plant, Sri Aurobindo says, "The same conciliation occurs everywhere, when we look with a straight and accurate look on the truth of the Reality. In our experience of it we become aware of an Infinite essentially free from all limitation by qualities, properties, features; on the other hand, we are aware of an Infinite teeming with innumerable qualities, properties, features. ...Here it is evident that it is an undue finiteness of thought conception and verbal expression which creates the difficulty, but there is in reality none; for it would be evidently absurd to say that the Absolute is courage or curing power, or to say that courage and curing power are the Absolute, but it would be equally absurd to deny the capacity of the Absolute to put forth courage or curing power as self-expressions in its manifestation. When the logic of the finite fails us, we have to see with a direct and unbound vision what is behind in the logic of the Infinite."

The transcendental seer who reaps the fruit of eons of mystical evolution "looks straight at Reality," "experiences it," and is "aware of" the causal origin of those qualities which begin to evolve in lower life forms, then in prehistory, and continue through tribal epochs, golden ages, warrior states and religions, ascetic theocracies, communistic and socialistic and democratic Leviathans. And he knows that each of these structures, just

like each human mind and body, more or less perfectly embodies and expresses, within the limitations of the physiological, emotional, and intellectual environment and culture of which each is a part, those qualities and drives, concepts and patterns which recur again and again at every location and in every era, because they are of the essence of the transcendent reality, the Absolute, and a product of the natural and divine order of the unfolding Universe.

The empiricist believes that this kind of knowledge and experience is the result of natural, hereditary, and evolutionary processes, and he knows that it has been the greatest ethical force in history for curbing the darker and more destructive drives of human nature. Yet he insists that its conclusions, and its actions, do not have the potential validity, power, and authority of his method, perhaps only because in his view the Opposing Theory believes it is more than, and other than, Nature.

Summary and Conclusion

It could be that Prof. Wilson's logic of consilience will ultimately fail him, as he admits. It even seems he fears that it might. He certainly knows that it doesn't have the leadership charisma of religion, and that time is short. He is painfully aware of the stress that the human population is putting on the biosphere, and also of the indiscriminate destruction of which it is capable. It is no wonder that the perceived tension leads him to say, "The choice between transcendentalism and empiricism will be the coming century's version of the struggle for men's souls." He feels that only science has the ability to make us aware of our connection to the planet and our responsibility for its survival. And he even reaches out to religion to embrace the truths of science as its own and make them felt. But he does not see the possibility of science discovering and embracing a truth beyond itself.

This is especially unfortunate, because to his way of thinking, a victory for transcendentalism would mean the defeat of science, and of hope. The last paradox is that the only real hope lies in the mutual embrace of the two truths, in a conciliation between the observable facts of nature,

including the mechanisms of evolution, the laws and patterns of behavior derived from them, the intricate interdependencies of species, energies, lives, and human thought formations, and the greater potentials of the Absolute from which they originate, towards which they strive, and by which they may yet be transformed into a progressively more luminous and harmonious future manifestation.

The problem, as stated from the transcendentalist's perspective, does not, in the end, look much different than the one presented by the empiricist, although its solution and its method are more certain. Sri Aurobindo again: "Our view of the divine government of the world or of the secret of its action is either incurably anthropomorphic or else incurably mechanical; both the anthropomorphism and mechanism have their elements of truth, but they are only a side, an aspect, and the real truth is that the world is governed by the One in all and over all who is infinite in his consciousness..." (*The Life Divine*, p.320). This perspective, this knowledge and understanding, can give us the leverage, and the freedom from atavistic limitations, that we need in order to act with absolute empathy for all beings, and to effectively reverse, or at least significantly alter our apparent fate. Then, by a deliberate psychological process, standing back from Nature, says Sri Aurobindo, it becomes possible to "know Nature and her processes and in all independence, since we are no longer involved in her works, to accept or not accept, to make the sanction no longer automatic but free and effective; we can choose what she shall do or not do in us, ...or we can reject her present formations and rise to a spiritual level of existence and from there re-create our existence..." (*The Life Divine*, p.315).

With the particularly pressing conjunction of Time and Population Growth that our civilization has to confront, and its unparalleled challenges, it would seem that the Absolute might welcome a new and enlightened science of social engineering as an ally. And Prof. Wilson, too, would gain valuable reinforcement from such a cooperative enterprise.

Those who are familiar with the work of Sri Aurobindo will have little

difficulty accommodating the view that the patterns and structures of existence, including human thought forms, are products of evolution. And they will also understand the empiricist's methodological difficulty. For the consciousness that is able to grasp the source of the mechanism of the evolution of consciousness, up and down the "world-stair", is a transformed consciousness, one in which:

All thought can know or widest sight perceive
And all that thought and sight can never know,
All things occult and rare, remote and strange
Were near to heart's contact, felt by spirit sense (*Savitri*, II.1.97)

The effort to achieve a grasp of the "subtle pattern of the universe" that makes consciousness possible, and is the key to every enigma, requires more than either ethical or empirical thought, and certainly more than a leap of faith. Well, perhaps a quantum leap.

Auroville

The Theoretical Background of Auroville

1. Introduction: the Spiritual Dimension

It will certainly seem atypical, at the end of the 20th Century, to begin a study of the economic development of a new township with a discussion of spiritual philosophy. But Auroville is in fact an atypical township, founded to provide an opportunity for its citizens to pursue the spiritual evolution of consciousness, to exceed ordinary human limitations, and to create a new type of human society. As its founder, Mirra Alfassa, known to all simply as the Mother, said of Auroville:

Earth needs a place where men can live away from all national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions; a place where human beings, freed from all slavery to the past, can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness that is seeking to manifest. Auroville wants to be this place and offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of tomorrow. (*The Mother on Auroville (TMOA)*, p.1, 20/9/69)

Behind the idea of this ambitious and futuristic project stands the monumental spiritual vision and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Recognised by many as one of the greatest spiritual visionaries of the century, a pioneer of India's liberation in the early part of the century, subsequently the author of a vast philosophical synthesis of Eastern spiritual and Western evolutionary thought, and a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950, Sri Aurobindo's vision and teaching are the foundation of Auroville. In the words of the Mother:

Auroville wants to be the first realisation of human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, where men of all countries would be at home. (TMOA, p.3, 1972)

It should be helpful, therefore, to present a brief summary of those aspects of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which are most essential to the

conception of Auroville. It is also, perhaps, necessary in order to understand the project's processes – economic, organisational, social, as well as its spiritual purpose – to begin with such a philosophical discussion, for it is an atypical township also in its material, social, and economic development, as we shall see.

1.1 Sri Aurobindo and the Ideal of Human Unity

Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy is based on a larger vision of the evolutionary progression of all of nature, including human beings and their societies, towards higher, or more ideal, levels of consciousness, resulting in progressively more perfect, or harmonious, levels of organisation and self-expression. Throughout all the processes of evolutionary nature, he sees an underlying principle of unity, developing and expressing itself through an ever expanding, mutually enriching diversity of individuals and collectivities. In his book titled *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he explained the process as he saw it:

The social evolution of the human race is necessarily a development of the relations between three constant factors, individuals, communities of various sorts, and mankind. Each seeks its own fulfilment and satisfaction, but each is compelled to develop them not independently but in relation to the others.

Men's communities are formed not so much by the instinctive herding together of a number of individuals of the same genus or species as by local association, community of interests and community of ideas; and these limits tend always to be overcome in the widening of human thoughts and sympathies brought about by the closer intermingling of races, nations, interests, ideas, cultures. Still, if overcome in their separatism, they are not abolished in their fact, because they repose on an essential principle of Nature, – diversity in unity. Therefore it would seem that the ideal or ultimate aim of Nature must be to develop the individual and all individuals to their full capacity, to develop the community and all communities to the full expression of that many-sided existence and potentiality which their differences were created to express, and to evolve the united life of mankind to its full common capacity and satisfaction, not by

suppression of the fullness of the life of the individual or the smaller commonalty, but by full advantage taken of the diversity which they develop. This would seem the soundest way to increase the total riches of mankind and throw them into a fund of common possession and enjoyment. (*IHU*,1970, p.398-400)

To provide a model for the world at large where such a mutually accommodating and enriching diversity of human potentials could be seen in action and become fully conscious, was clearly a fundamental aim of the Mother in creating Auroville. And Auroville was not her first attempt. When she first began speaking concretely about her plan of Auroville in 1965, she made reference to “an old idea” that she had expressed when she created the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in her Ashram in Pondicherry. At that time, in 1952, she wrote:

The most important idea is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its own genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive and progressive unification which has any chance of enduring. ...All impulses of rivalry, all struggle for precedence and domination must disappear and give way to a will for harmonious organisation, for clear-sighted and effective collaboration. ...To make this possible, the children should be accustomed from a very early age not merely to the idea itself, but to its practice. That is why the international university centre will be international; not because students from all countries will be admitted here, nor even because they will be taught in their own language, but above all because the cultures of the various parts of the world will be presented here so as to be accessible to all, not merely intellectually in ideas, theories, principles and language... The ideal would be for every nation with a well-defined culture to have a pavilion representing that culture, built in a style that is expressive of the customs of the country; it will exhibit the nation’s most representative products, natural as well as manufactured, and also the best expressions of intellectual and artistic genius. ...Each nation would thus have a very special practical and concrete interest in this cultural synthesis and could collaborate in the work by taking responsibility for the pavilion that represents it. (An International University Centre, *Collected Works of the Mother*, 1980,Vol.

This educational environment was never realised in the school she created as part of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, but the concept became a cornerstone of her plan of Auroville. For example, when speaking to someone about the plan, she said:

We have four big sections: the cultural section to the North, that is to say towards Madras; to the East, the industrial section; to the South, the international section; and to the West, that is to say towards the lake, the residential section.

To make myself clear: the residential section, where there will be the houses of the people who have already subscribed and of all the others who are coming in large number to have a plot in Auroville. That will be next to the lake.

The international section: we have already approached a certain number of ambassadors and countries for each one to have its pavilion – a pavilion from every country. ...The buildings should be constructed according to the architecture of each country – it should be like a document of information. Then, depending on the money they wish to spend, they could also have accommodation for students, conference rooms, etc., a cuisine of the country, a restaurant of the country, – they could have all kinds of developments. (*TMOA*, p.59-60, June 1965)

Although the 20th Century has seen considerable progress towards the unification of nations, especially through economic and technological networks, and the gradual breakdown of historical obstacles such as racism and imperial domination has allowed for a greater freedom of self-determination among nations, still the obstacles to an ideal global unity-in-diversity are many. And for Auroville, too, the level of international cooperation and participation envisioned by the Mother, in order to create a sort of educational model of the global ideal, was still far from taking concrete shape even after thirty years of development. Only the pavilions of Indian and Tibetan culture were yet underway. And the location of Auroville itself, as well as the orientation of its “four big sections,” had shifted, to accommodate practical and conventional necessities. But in fact, neither Sri Aurobindo nor the Mother ever indicated that the ideals they were proposing would be easy to achieve,

or that the path to the goal would be straight and narrow. They always presented their goals as a possibility and a challenge, implying first of all the necessity of a fundamental change of consciousness, and a radical departure from ordinary accepted practice.

For example, when considering the problem of freedom versus order in society, Sri Aurobindo wrote of its inherent difficulties:

The united progress of mankind would thus be realised by a general principle of interchange and assimilation between individual and individual and again between individual and community, between community and community and again between the smaller commonalty and the totality of mankind, between the common life and consciousness of mankind and its freely developing communal and individual constituents. As a matter of fact, although this interchange is what Nature even now contrives to bring about to a certain extent, life is far from being governed by such a principle of free and harmonious mutuality. There is a struggle, an opposition of ideas, impulses, interests, an attempt of each to profit by various kinds of war on the others, by a kind of intellectual, vital, physical robbery and theft or even by the suppression, devouring, digestion of its fellows rather than by a free and rich interchange. This is the aspect of life which humanity in its highest thought and aspiration knows that it has to transcend, but has either not yet discovered the right means or else has not had the force to apply it. It now endeavours instead to get rid of strife and the disorders of growth by a strong subordination or servitude of the life of the individual to the life of the community and, logically, it will be led to the attempt to get rid of strife between communities by a strong subordination or servitude of the life of the community to the united and organised life of the human race. To remove freedom in order to get rid of disorder, strife and waste, to remove diversity in order to get rid of separatism and jarring complexities is the impulse of order and regimentation by which the arbitrary rigidity of the intellectual reason seeks to substitute its straight line for the difficult curves of the process of Nature.

But freedom is as necessary to life as law and regime; diversity is as necessary as unity to our true completeness. Existence is only one in its essence and totality, in its play it is necessarily multiform. Absolute

uniformity would mean the cessation of life, while on the other hand, the vigour of the pulse of life may be measured by the richness of the diversities which it creates. At the same time, while diversity is essential for power and fruitfulness of life, unity is necessary for its order, arrangement and stability. Unity we must create, but not necessarily uniformity. If man could realise a perfect spiritual unity, no sort of uniformity would be necessary; for the utmost play of diversity would be securely possible on that foundation. (*IHU*, p.400-401)

The classical social problem of the individual versus the collectivity, freedom versus law, is thus elegantly stated by Sri Aurobindo as the problem to be solved by an evolving humanity. And the solution that is proposed, the only solution that will ultimately be satisfactory, in his view, is the realisation of a true spiritual unity.

Therefore we see that in this harmony between our unity and our diversity lies the secret of life; Nature insists equally in all her works upon unity and upon variation. We shall find that a real spiritual and psychological unity can allow a free diversity and dispense with all but the minimum of uniformity which is sufficient to embody the community of nature and of essential principle.

Nature does not manufacture, does not impose a pattern or rule from outside; she impels life to grow from within and to assert its own natural law and development modified only by its commerce with its environment. ...The dangers and disadvantages of liberty, the disorder, strife, waste and confusion to which its wrong use leads are indeed obvious. But they arise from the absence or defect of the sense of unity between individual and individual, between community and community, which pushes them to assert themselves at the expense of each other instead of growing by mutual help and interchange and to assert freedom for themselves in the very act of encroaching on the free development of their fellows. If a real, a spiritual and psychological unity were effectuated, liberty would have no perils and disadvantages; for free individuals enamoured of unity would be compelled by themselves, by their own need, to accommodate perfectly their own growth with the growth of their fellows and would not feel themselves complete except in the free growth of others. (*IHU*, p.400-403)

The way for humanity to realise that fundamental freedom and unity,

according to Sri Aurobindo's vision, is through the process of an integral Yoga leading to a transformation of consciousness. Such an endeavour presupposes two fundamental principles: 1) there is an essential spiritual unity inherent in the evolving multiplicity of Nature, which all the processes of Nature labour to express; and 2) this unity can be consciously realised by human beings through a heightening and spiritualising of natural processes. These principles are made the key to the deliberate achievement of a material and social perfection. Moreover, this perfection is the destiny of an evolving humanity.

From these premises follows the Mother's efforts – heroically optimistic, perhaps, in today's predominantly materialistic world – to create a laboratory of human evolution, first in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and later in the international township of Auroville. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, the conclusion is reached that this is also the general direction and eventual goal of social evolution for humanity as a whole. This is the subject of his other major work on social development, titled *The Human Cycle*, in which he indicated the essential role of the soul in evolution, and the type of consciousness that is destined to emerge in humanity.

The solution lies not in the reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it. (*THC*, 1970, p. 206)

The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. ...For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility... And as it will regard man the

individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. (*THC*, p. 212-213)

1.2 The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

The term *Yoga*, for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, signifies much more than the physical fitness exercises and meditation practices readily available on popular videocassettes. Their Yoga aims at a spiritual transformation of mind, life, and body, and embraces not only the whole person, but also the whole society and its complex range of interactions among individuals. Sri Aurobindo elaborated the proposition, and the requirements of the process, most fully in his book, *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

Life, not a remote silent or high-uplifted ecstatic Beyond – Life alone, is the field of our Yoga. The transformation of our superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of thinking, seeing, feeling and being into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness and an integrated inner and outer existence and of our ordinary human living into the divine way of life must be its central purpose. The means towards this supreme end is a self-giving of all our nature to the Divine.

And this means, first, to disinherit desire and no longer accept the enjoyment of desire as the ruling human motive. The spiritual life will draw its sustenance not from desire but from a pure and selfless spiritual delight of essential existence. ...In the ordinary human existence an outgoing action is obviously three-fourths or even more of our life. ...But if this total conversion is to be done, there must be a consecration of our action and outer movements as much as of our mind and heart to the Divine. There must be accepted and progressively accomplished a surrender of our capacities of working into the hands of a greater Power behind us and our sense of being the doer and worker must disappear. ...There must be effected a complete transformation of our limited and distorted egoistic life and works into the large and direct outpouring of a greater divine Life, Will and Energy that now secretly supports us. ...This total consecration and surrender and this resultant entire transformation and free transmission make up the whole fundamental means and the ultimate aim of an integral

Karmayoga. (SY, 1970, p.83-85)

That the Mother envisioned this process as the fundamental purpose of life in Auroville was explicitly stated:

Auroville is created to realise the ideal of Sri Aurobindo who taught us the Karma Yoga. Auroville is for those who want to do the Yoga of work. To live in Auroville means to do the Yoga of work. So all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga. (TMOA, p.47, 27/3/73)

The rationale for such an “integral” spiritual work, involving the individual and the collectivity in a psychological and social process of mutual transformation, was stated in her early essay on the formation of an international university. There, what is envisioned is clearly a radical change of both terms – the individual and the society, – which is a central theme throughout the teachings and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Prophets of a new humanity have followed one another; religions, spiritual or social, have been created; their beginnings have sometimes been promising, but as humanity has not been fundamentally transformed, the old errors arising from human nature itself have gradually reappeared and after some time we find ourselves almost back at the point we had started from with so much hope and enthusiasm. Also, in this effort to improve human conditions, there have always been two tendencies, which seem to be contrary but which ought to complement each other so that progress may be achieved. The first advocates a collective reorganisation, something which could lead to the effective unity of mankind. The other declares that all progress is made first by the individual and insists that the individual should be given the conditions in which he can progress freely. Both are equally true and necessary, and our effort should be directed along both these lines at once. For collective progress and individual progress are interdependent. Before the individual can take a leap forward, at least a little of the preceding progress must have been realised in the collectivity. A way must therefore be found so that these two types of progress may proceed side by side. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 12, p.39-40)

The dynamics of such a transformational process of integral Yoga had been discussed by Sri Aurobindo, philosophically, even before the Mother began the work of the Ashram in the early 1920's, and long before the conception of Auroville.

Therefore if the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together. There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to re-create themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at the least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating, ready to follow and effectively arrive, not compelled by its own inherent deficiencies, its defect of preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made.

Such a simultaneity has never yet happened, although the appearance of it has sometimes been created by the ardour of a moment. That the combination must happen some day is a certainty, but none can tell how many attempts will have to be made and how many sediments of spiritual experience accumulated in the subconscious mentality of the communal mind before the soil is ready. For the chances of success are always less powerful in a difficult upward effort affecting the very roots of our nature than the numerous possibilities of failure. (*IHU*, p. 232)

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother recognised the many contingencies upon which the success of such a unique undertaking would depend, and in hundreds of pages of published correspondence and conversations with disciples, as well as in their systematic written works, they insisted on the necessity of fulfilling certain conditions – for both the gurus and the disciples and practitioners of their Yoga.

For the *gurus*, and more advanced practitioners of their Yoga, the goal was what Sri Aurobindo described as a “supramental descent,” or the transformation of the individual into an entirely new and divine consciousness, force, and way of functioning:

The lifting of the level of consciousness from the mind to the supermind and the consequent transformation of the being from the state of the mental to that of the supramental...must bring with it, to be complete, a transformation of all the parts of the nature and all its activities. The whole mind is not merely made into a passive channel of the supramental activities, a channel of their downflow into the life and body and of their outflow or communication with the outward world, the material existence – that is only the first stage of the process, – but is itself supramentalised along with all its instruments. There is accordingly a change, a profound transformation in the physical sense, a supramentalising of the physical sight, hearing, touch, etc., that creates or reveals to us a quite different view, not merely of life and its meaning, but even of the material world and all its forms and aspects. (SY, p. 836)

In a thirteen volume series of transcribed conversations, titled *Mother's Agenda*, we find a continuous commentary by the Mother on this process of transformation as she was experiencing it herself, especially during the years between 1956 and 1973. And it is in these conversations, also, that we find most of her comments on the inspiration, foundation, and organisation of Auroville. As for the necessary conditions to be met by the practitioners of the “karmayoga” in Auroville, her comments were direct and unequivocal:

Everybody has to progress and become more sincere. Auroville has been created not for the satisfaction of the egos and their greeds, but for the creation of a new world, the supramental, expressing the divine perfection.

Auroville has been created for a superhumanity, for those who want to surmount their ego and renounce all desire, to prepare themselves for receiving the supermind. They alone are true Aurovilians. (TMOA, p.37, 1972)

To Be A True Aurovillian:

1. The first thing needed is the inner discovery, to find out what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the center there is a being, free and vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who should become the active center of our being and our life in Auroville.

2. One lives in Auroville to be free from moral and social conventions; but this freedom must not be a new enslavement to the ego, to its desires and ambitions. The fulfilment of one's desires bars the way to the inner discovery, which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.

3. The Aurovilian should lose the sense of proprietary possession. For our passage in the material world, what is indispensable to our life and action is put at our disposal according to the place we must occupy. The more we are in conscious contact with our inner being, the more will the exact means be given to us.

4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If we do not work, if we do not put our consciousness into matter, matter will never develop. To allow the consciousness to organise a little matter by means of one's body is very good. To create order around us helps to create order within us.

We should organise our lives not according to outer artificial rules, but according to an organised inner consciousness, for if we let life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes dispersed and inexpressive. It is a waste of time in the sense that no conscious use is made of matter.

5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent.

6. Little by little it will be revealed what this new species must be, and meanwhile, the best course is to consecrate ourselves entirely to the Divine. (*Mother's Agenda* (2000), Vol.11, June 3-13, 1970)

2. Implementing the Vision: the Material Dimension

Although relatively brief, this rather elaborate exposition of the spiritual nature and purpose of the Auroville project should be a helpful background for all that is to follow. To readers who are not familiar with this "inner" perspective, and the larger spiritual goals of Auroville, the process of its development, the community and its experiences, its dynamics of growth, and its place in the world, will probably appear paradoxical at best.

For example, Auroville began with resolutions of support by the United

Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation and the Government of India. The foundation ceremony, on February 28, 1968, was attended by representatives of all the member states of UNESCO, who deposited a symbolic handful of soil in an urn at the centre of the Auroville site. And there, the *Charter of Auroville*, read aloud by the Mother to the thousands that had gathered for the ceremony, proclaimed something extraordinary:

The Charter of Auroville

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
4. Auroville will be the site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

And on the same day, she gave this message: "Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will. Are invited to Auroville, all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life." (*TMOA*, p.30, 28-2-68)

During the next few months and years, however, as the process of development actually began on that barren plateau in South India, only a handful of "pioneers" remained. Those "forecomers," who grew in number to only 400 in the first ten years, and less than 800 in the next ten years, were soon to learn, from their own experience as well as from District Forestry Department officials, that the designated terrain for their adventure was so depleted and badly eroded that it would not be able to sustain life for more than another twenty five years. The task of reversing the physical, environmental situation was therefore the first to be faced. Progress was slow and laborious, but impressive, as millions of tree seedlings were planted and tended by the Aurovilian

“greenworkers.”

Between then and now, a massive reforestation effort has succeeded in creating a revived and verdant landscape, famous as a demonstration site for methodical techniques of environmental restoration. The Auroville terrain is now a forest. And the rural village population of the local area – formerly limited to subsistence agriculture – now finds itself engaged, alongside members of an international community, in all the varieties of agriculture, cottage industries, construction projects, services and infrastructure development necessary for the conduct of life in a budding, multicultural township – in rural India. At the centre of this verdant terrain and bustling milieu, stands the Matrimandir, a multimillion dollar architectural wonder, symbolic of the central, spiritual power and purpose of Auroville.

The primary focus of this study will be to survey the first thirty years of Auroville’s material development and growth in terms of measurable factors: demographic, social, cultural, economic, etc. And it will be tempting, in the process, to become exclusively preoccupied with these “secular” aspects of the complex and many-faceted experiment which, as the Mother said, is to “take advantage of all discoveries from without and from within.” But even here, in the dimension termed the “multiplicity” in Indian spiritual philosophy, there is the ever-present background of essential “unity” to be realised, and the Ideal which must be kept in view, against which the most material aspects of life should be measured, in order to be fully understood and evaluated. Much was said and written about the conduct of this active, material life – which is the field of the Integral Yoga, – by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. And, therefore, in order to keep things in perspective, it should be beneficial once again to consider what I have called “the theoretical background.”

2.1 Principles and Guidelines of Social Development

The text that is most often quoted with regard to Auroville’s social goals, and which stands above all others as the Mother’s invocation of what Auroville is to become, was written in 1954 and titled by her *A Dream*. Let us state it in full at this point.

There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organise. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities. Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work. In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it or the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream.

Yet, this dream is on the way to becoming a reality. That is exactly what we are seeking to do at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on a small scale, in proportion to our modest means. The achievement is indeed far from being perfect but it is progressive: little by little we advance towards our goal which, we hope, one day we shall be able to hold up before the world as a practical and effective means of coming out of the present chaos in order to be born into a more true, more harmonious new life. (*TMOA*, p.7, August 1954)

Much of what the Mother eventually had to say about Auroville, once the idea had been formulated and the project began to materialise, was a restatement and elaboration of these principles and goals – so apparently simple yet so difficult to put into practice. For example, in a conversation in December 1967, just weeks before the foundation ceremony, she outlined a set of social and economic principles for Auroville, which she said would be “a sort of adaptation of the communist system, but not in a spirit of levelling...,” emphasising especially that it would be an experiment, an attempt to realise a truer social arrangement respecting the capacities, both inner and outer, of each individual. Excerpts from the conversation will illustrate the general thrust of the Mother’s vision, and the challenge it set for Auroville.

Auroville will be a self-supporting township.

I want to insist on the fact that this will be an experiment, it is for making experiments – experiments, researches, studies. Auroville will be a city that will try to be, or will lean towards, or want to be “self-supporting,” that is to say... “Autonomous” is understood to mean some kind of independence which cuts one off from relations with the outside, and that is not what I mean. For example, those who are involved in the production of food, ...(naturally, when there will be 50,000 people it will be difficult to meet their needs, but for the moment we are only a few thousand at most) well, a factory always produces too much, so it will sell that excess outside and earn money.

There is one thing I wanted to say: participation in the well-being and life of the town as a whole is not something calculated on an individual basis; such and such an individual should give so much, not like that. ...It is calculated according to one’s means: he who has a lot to

give gives a lot, he who has little gives little; one who is strong works hard, one who is not strong does something else. Well, it is something truer, deeper.

All who live there will participate in its life and development. ... according to their capacities and means, not mechanically, so much per unit. That's it, it must be something living and True, not mechanical; and according to each one's capacities.

This participation may be passive or active. Those who have a higher knowledge need not work with their hands, that is what I meant.

There will be no taxes as such, but each will contribute to the collective welfare in work, kind or money. Those who have nothing to give but money will give money. But "work" may mean an inner work, to tell the truth. The work can be an occult work, wholly within oneself, but for that, one must be absolutely sincere and truthful, and capable of it, not pretentious.

Sections like industries which participate actively will contribute part of their income towards the development of the township; or if they produce something, like foodstuffs, useful for the citizens, they will contribute in kind to the township, which is responsible for feeding its citizens. ...The organisation should be such, should be so arranged, that the material necessities of everyone will be assured not on the basis of ideas of rights and equality, but on the basis of the most elementary necessities. Once that is established, each one will be free to organise his life around – not monetary means, but his inner capacities.

No rules or laws are being framed. Things will get formulated as the underlying truth of the township emerges and takes shape progressively. We do not anticipate. ...What I mean to say is that usually, always until now and more and more and more, men establish mental rules according to their conceptions and ideals, and then apply them, and that is absolutely false, it is arbitrary, unreal, and the result is that things revolt or wither and disappear. ...It is the experience of Life Itself that should slowly work out rules that are as Supple and Wide as possible, in such a way as to be always progressive. Nothing should be fixed.

That is the great error of governments: they make a framework and say "There you are, we have set this up and now we must live under it,"

and so of course they crush the life in it and stop it from progressing. It must be Life itself developing more and more in a progression towards the Light, the Knowledge, the Power that should, little by little, establish rules, as general as possible so that they are extremely flexible and amenable to change, to change with the need as quickly as needs and habits change.

The problem finally reduces itself to this: to replace the mental government of intelligence with the government of a spiritualised consciousness. (Auroville References in *Mother's Agenda*, p.53-59, Dec. 30, 1967)

The Mother clearly saw Auroville as a township with a sizeable population – 50,000 people, and a substantial economic and commercial base to support the freedom of inner spiritual growth, as well as the manifold and opulent outward expression, of all its citizens. In a slightly earlier conversation, for example, she had described a vision of the industrial section of Auroville which “would go down towards the sea, and if possible there would be a kind of wharf – not exactly a port but a place where boats could come alongside; and all these industries, with the inland transportation they need, would have a possibility to export directly.” And of the cultural section, she said “There will be a library, there will be a museum with all sorts of exhibitions...a film studio, a film school, a gliding club...then towards Madras, where there is plenty of space, a stadium. We want this stadium to be the most modern and perfect possible...” (*TMOA*, p. 60-61, June 1965).

The idea of an optimal population, engaged in all the activities of a modern, urban community, was reinforced in a conversation with a small, early group of newcomers to Auroville who had settled in the community of Aspiration. They were visiting the Mother and questioning the difficulty they were having in reconciling the inner, spiritual motive for coming to Auroville, with the expectation that they engage themselves in a more conventional material development. The Mother reiterated the necessity of such an engagement in all aspects of the outer, material life, and learning to make that the field of a spiritual transformation. It should be instructive to revisit that conversation at length, and to recall its relevance in the context of the daily life of

Auroville even today.

Aspiration: We would like to speak to you about work in Aspiration. What we would like to know, what we are looking for is the right attitude.

The Mother: What is the trouble?

Aspiration: The trouble is...

The Mother: Each one pulls in his own direction.

Aspiration: Each one pulls in his own direction. No one is really in contact with what is true...

The Mother: We should take into account that we are starting from the present state of humanity. So you must face all the difficulties; you must find the solution...

Aspiration: But Sweet Mother, you know, several solutions are open to us. For instance, on one hand...

The Mother: Every man has his own solution, and that is the great difficulty. To be in the truth, each one has his own solution. And yet we must find a way for all these solutions to work together. ...So the framework must be vast, very flexible, and there must be a great goodwill from everyone: that is the first condition – the first individual condition – goodwill, to be flexible enough to do the best thing to be done at each moment.

Aspiration: But for example, we are told that factories are needed, that there must be production, and some of us don't feel like doing work in that sense. They would rather do some research that is more...

The Mother: More inward?

Aspiration: More inward, rather than to launch into factories, work, production to make money, etc. That is not what we feel, that is not what we want to do in Aspiration at the moment. We would like to know what you think about it.

The Mother (after a long silence): To be practical, you must first have a clear vision of your goal, of where you are going. From this point of view, take money for example. An ideal which may be several hundred years ahead of its time, we don't know: money should be a power which belongs to nobody and which should be controlled by the

most universal wisdom of the place; on earth, say, by someone who has a vision vast enough to be able to know the needs of the earth and precise enough to be able to tell where the money should go. You understand, we are very far from that, aren't we? For the moment, the gentleman still says, "This is mine," and when he is generous, he says, "I will give it to you." That's not it.

There is a long way to go between what we are and what must be. And for that we must be very flexible, never losing sight of the goal, but knowing that we cannot reach it at one bound and that we must find the way. Well, that is much more difficult, even more difficult than to make the inner discovery. Truly speaking, that should have been made before coming here.

For there is a starting-point: when you have found within yourself the light that never wavers, the presence which can guide you with certitude, then you become aware that constantly, in everything that happens, there is something to be learnt, and that in the present state of matter, there is always a progress to be made. That is how one should come, eager to find out at every minute the progress to be made. To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be: "A life that wants to grow and perfect itself." And above all, not in the same way for everyone – each one has his own way.

Well, now there are thirty of you, it is difficult, isn't it? When there are thirty thousand of you, it will be easier, because, naturally, there will be many more possibilities. You are the pioneers, you have the most difficult task, but I feel it is the most interesting one. Because you must establish in a concrete, durable and growing way the attitude that is needed to truly be an Aurovilian. To learn every day the lesson of the day... Each sunrise is an opportunity to make a discovery. So, with that state of mind, you find out. Everyone does.

And the body needs activity: if you keep it inactive, it will begin to revolt, become sick, and so on. It needs an activity, it really needs an activity like planting flowers, building a house, something really material. You must feel it. Some people do exercises, some ride bicycles, there are countless activities, but in your little group you must all come to an agreement so that each one can find the activity which suits his temperament, his nature and his needs. But not with ideas. Ideas are

not much good, ideas give you preconceptions, for example, "That is a good work, that work is not worthy of me," and all that sort of nonsense. There is no bad work – there are only bad workers. All work is good when you know how to do it in the right way. Everything. And it is a kind of communion. If you are fortunate enough to be conscious of an inner light, you will see that in your manual work, it is as if you called the Divine down into things; then the communion becomes very concrete, there is a whole world to be discovered, it is marvellous. (TMOA, p. 90-92, 10/3/1970)

2.2 Money and Organisation

The Mother's views on money and organisation, as they were expressed periodically with reference to Auroville between 1965 and 1973, and the view that rules should be subordinated to a more spontaneous process of natural growth and development, will appear in the context of today's world to be as fundamentally radical – and elusive – as the idea of a spiritual transformation of all of life. But that is precisely the crux of the matter for Auroville, and many of the issues of its development during the first thirty years turn, therefore, around these basic problems.

The Mother clearly saw a solution to the problems that we normally associate with money and organisation, for the individual as well as on the larger institutional scale, in turning them over to a higher power of consciousness. She indicated this, as we have seen, in *The Dream*: "In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities. ...in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position." And to achieve this value shift, she said in *To Be a True Aurovilian*, one "should lose the sense of personal possession." These ideas were made more explicit in several later conversations. For example:

The true attitude is this: money is a universal force intended to do a work on earth, the work necessary to prepare the earth to receive and manifest the divine forces, and it (that is, the power of utilisation) must

come into the hands of those who have the clearest, most comprehensive, truest vision. ...But naturally we need some very clear-headed brains and very upright intermediaries in order to be everywhere at once and do everything at once. Then that notorious question of money would be solved. ...Money belongs to no one; money is a collective possession which should be used only by those who have an integral, comprehensive and universal vision. And I would add something to that: not only integral and comprehensive, but also essentially TRUE, that is, a vision which can distinguish between a use which is in accord with the universal progress and a use that could be termed fanciful. But those are details because even mistakes – even, from a certain viewpoint, waste – serve the general progress: these are lessons learned the hard way.

The first thing that should be accepted and recognised by everyone is that the invisible and higher power (that is, the power which belongs to a plane of consciousness which is veiled for the most part but which can be attained, a consciousness which can be called by any name, it doesn't matter, but which is integral and pure in the sense that it is not false: in the Truth), that this power is capable of ordering material things in a MUCH TRUER, happier and better way for everyone than any material power. That's the first point. Once people agree on that... (Auroville References in *Mother's Agenda*, p.83-86, April 10, 1968).

In the Mother's reflections on Auroville, the role and use of money is, of course, frequently associated with questions of organisation and governance. And both of these domains of social and economic concern are to be dealt with in Auroville by that "indispensable conscious force" which is normally lacking in mankind, as the Mother always acknowledges, and yet which she insists is realisable through the practice of an integral Yoga. This point is made again and again, along with the suggestion, also frequently made, that not only will the importance of money and conventional modes of governance be de-emphasised, but that they will eventually be dispensed with in Auroville altogether:

...the idea is that those who will live in Auroville won't have money – there's no circulation of money – ...You know, the idea is that in Auroville there won't be any customs and duties and that the

Aurovilians won't have any personal property: on paper that's all very well, but when it comes down to doing it practically...

There is a psychological viewpoint: there is something very interesting, which is that material needs diminish in proportion to the spiritual consciousness. Not through asceticism, but rather because the attention, the concentration of the being shifts fields...

The conditions for organising – for being an organiser (it's not "governing," it's ORGANISING) – the conditions for being an organiser should be as follows: no more desires, no more preferences, no more attractions, no more repulsions – a perfect equality for all. (Auroville References in *Mother's Agenda*, p. 190-191, March 25, 1970)

To fall below such a level of impartiality, transparency, and universal wideness, in making practical, organisational and financial decisions, she suggested, would be at best an approximation, and "not much better than democracy...the system which wants to govern by majority and minority." And she suggested that another, intermediate solution might be tried. "If there is no representative of the supreme Consciousness, ... then perhaps this could be replaced by the government of a few – which should be decided between four and eight, something like that: four, seven or eight – who have an INTUITIVE intelligence" (p. 86-87).

2.3 A Divine Anarchy

These were the ideals, the experiments to be tried, the way to be found with the goal in view of a new type of social organisation, for a new type of humanity, as yet unknown for the most part by present day humanity. The way that such a process would work was at times referred to, by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as a sort of divine anarchy. There is no doubt that the Aurovilians of today have acquired a profound appreciation for this concept, and for the opportunity that the Mother created in Auroville for each one to "find out at every minute the progress to be made."

To be able to undertake this radical social and psychological experiment from its earliest stages, under conditions in which "No rules are being framed," and where "we do not anticipate," where constant progress is

to be made towards the goals set forth, but “above all, not in the same way for everyone – each one has his own way” is truly an extraordinary opportunity. And it is certain that, day by day, the ideas that have been set in motion here become less and less theoretical as concrete progress is actually made towards putting them into practice. It is equally certain that the difficulties anticipated by the Mother and experienced by her, as well as the Consciousness and Force that were created by more than fifty years of her Yoga for dealing with those difficulties, are now realities of the daily experience of life in Auroville.

The fact that the long range ideals set before this community of men, women, and children from so many different backgrounds, countries, and cultural orientations, may still be hundreds of years ahead of their time, and that it is “starting from the present state of humanity,” as it were, is perhaps the source of its courage and determination, as it learns through trial and error the way towards those goals that are so important for this struggling humanity. And for those who are able to perceive it, in spite of the difficulties, pitfalls, and frustrations that inevitably present themselves along the way, an observation made by the Mother about the nature of the adventure of Auroville more than thirty years ago, becomes more and more concrete with every new victory:

The feeling of an irresistible Power which governs everything: the world, things, people, everything... without having to lift a finger materially, and that this material hyper-activity is nothing more than a kind of foam that forms when water runs very fast – a foam on the surface – while the force runs underneath it like an all-powerful current. ...There’s nothing else to say.

That experience came in connection with Auroville. You know, people are getting nervous because it’s “not going quickly;” so I had that vision of the formation, the divine creation which is happening underneath, all-powerful, irresistible, and in spite of all this outer commotion. (Auroville References in *Mother’s Agenda*, p. 28-29, April 23, 1966)

If it were not for this underlying reality, the dynamics of the “process” –

as it has come to be known – of Auroville’s growth and development, which is to be described in much more detail in the economic study that follows, would never have been able to unfold to experience and discovery. And it is tangible.

MONEY AND THE MILLENNIUM

An Economical Perspective – 1998

In the late seventies-early eighties, I wrote several detailed reports on Auroville’s development, including a financial report, based on a successful community-wide survey to determine what the economy actually looked like at the time. The results were published in an article titled “On the Uses and Abuses of Money” in the *Auroville Review*, No.6, 1982. With the information, a more informed discussion of economic guidelines then became possible, a more realistic picture emerged, agreements were reached – in principle at least, and guidelines were formulated.

Arriving recently for a visit, after ten years in America, I was told that financial concerns and economic guidelines were currently hot topics, and the suggestion was made that a survey such as the one I had once done would be useful at this time. I became interested, naturally, and started asking questions to see what the issues were at present, and how a survey might help. Although I did not have time to study the situation in depth, various aspects of the current picture did emerge which, in my view, indicate that good, hard data might be very useful for making crucial decisions.

One thing was obvious to me: everything in Auroville is now bigger and better than it was ten years ago, and especially so compared with development twenty years ago. Growth is powerfully apparent. But everything is also more complex, the possible directions ahead are correspondingly more problematic, and it is altogether more interesting. It is not a “survival” situation anymore, the forests are beautiful, living accommodations are relatively comfortable, people are well-fed, life is

more dynamic. This picture was certainly not always the one seen!

But the economic patterns seem to be still very similar. For example, in the late seventies we recognized three parallel economies: the collective (Pour Tous Fund), the individual (personal funds), and the units (commercial). A survey and report done in the late eighties, titled "Aurovilians and Their Maintenance," declared the two pillars of the economy to be the Central Fund (or collective) and the Individual (or personal). Today, the most prominent debate about the economy concerns the relationships between the Central Fund, individual or personal funds, which have always been a mainstay of development, and the profits of the increasingly successful commercial units.

In 1982, the Pour Tous budget was 14 lakhs a year (a lakh is 100,000 rupees or \$1,622.12 in 2014), and individual investments plus personal maintenance expenses outside the central fund were 27 lakhs, or about double the central fund. Commercial units were then making an estimated 12 lakhs. It is possible to determine from reports that the Central Fund budget in 1990 was 41 lakhs (tripled in ten years), and individual investments outside the Central Fund can be deduced to have been approximately 82 lakhs (also tripled in ten years). Commercial profits of the units were at least 28 lakhs, based on their contributions to the Central Fund.

Today, the pattern appears to be quite similar, but growth more dramatic. The Central Fund budget is now 330 lakhs (up by a factor of almost 10 in ten years). Independent individual investment at present can be estimated at 300 lakhs for housing and infrastructure, and 540 lakhs, (or 6500 Rs. a month, which is probably a conservative estimate from what I have seen) for personal maintenance of the majority of Aurovilians, who are not dependent on the Central Fund, also up by a factor of 10. And commercial profits can be estimated at an average of 300 + lakhs/yr (also increased by a factor of 10), based on their Central Fund contributions.

In 1982 the total Aurovilian population was 480 and the money economy was 53 lakhs. In 1990 the population was 675, and the

economy 151 lakhs. Today the population is 1475, and the money economy has grown to 1500 lakhs. This is one lakh per person per year to keep Auroville going, in some sense. This, again, is the equivalent of 2500 US dollars per person, which is the salary of a teacher in America for one month; 1500 lakhs is less than 5 million US dollars: not a lot of money, and yet still far from what is needed.

But for Auroville today, these numbers nevertheless spell growth and prosperity. In the eighties the population increased by 40% and the money economy tripled. In the nineties the population increased by 118% and the economy grew by a factor of 10. The comparison provides at least a partially accurate picture of the obvious economic growth, admitting that specific projects, grants, Matrimandir, land purchase, industrial capital investment, and new industries (which all probably constitute separate economies) are not included, and that current hard data is not yet sufficiently available.

Obviously, the number of people coming to Auroville is steadily growing. But more importantly, they are bringing in more money than they used to do! And the people in production are also producing more. Consequently, the standard of living is rising. And it is rising across the board. But because the individual economy is still the largest, it is also creating a growing disparity! If there are twice as many people as ten years ago, and half or more have 5 or 6 or 10 times more money to spend than the others, who depend on two or three thousand rupees a month from the Central Fund, the situation naturally gives rise to questions of distribution, management, fairness, and so on. (In 2008 much more hard data was available, on the basis of which a book on Auroville's economic development from 1968 to 2008 was published, in 2013, by Henk Thomas and Manuel Thomas, titled *Economics for People and Earth*, to which I contributed some data. This study shows that the 2008 central fund turnover was 3500 lakhs, another increase by a factor of 10. The population had increased by another 40% to over 2000, and the "maintenance" stipend had doubled to Rs. 6000, while at the same time the 'personal' economy had also continued to grow as evidenced by the building of large private homes and the disproportionate number

of people with independent incomes.)

Therefore, we hear from people, and read in Auroville publications, various complaints – which we may consider to be “issues” to be addressed. For example, from the collective point of view, those with a higher standard of living do not contribute enough to general services and welfare. From the individual point of view, there is not much to be gained by putting resources in the Central Fund, when more can be accomplished outside of it while the money is at hand. Such economic issues seem to be inevitable at this point. And along with them go the corresponding moral issues of “trust”, “honesty”, “efficiency”, and “the common good”, or perhaps “the higher good”. Altogether, they constitute a ripe occasion for progress to be made.

It seems to me that Auroville, with its growing wealth and potential, might be well advised at this time to make some important decisions for the future with regard to priorities and strategies of development, especially in the areas of infrastructure development for new industry and commercial opportunity, and in areas of general welfare such as education, health, housing, utilities, transportation, etc., based on a transparent look at the whole economic and demographic picture at present. Such deliberation could well bring in an era of considerably greater progress. And to do it, better systems of accountability and transparency, which have often been touted in reports, would certainly help.

It is of course inevitable that the Mother’s vision of Auroville, and in particular of its economy, will always be the challenge, the goal to be achieved, and the measure of progress, however far or near it may seem in relation to everyday reality. In 1970 she said, “What we may call the ‘reign of money’ is drawing to its close. But the transitional period between the arrangement that has existed in the world till now, and the one to come (in a hundred years, for instance), that period is going to be very difficult – is very difficult” (*Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 11, p. 114). At the same time, she foresaw the collapse of the state controlled economy and the return of control to individual producers, which is now known as

the “market economy,” nearly a decade before this became the general trend in the world.

Now it is possible to see some of the negative consequences of this new trend: the market economy favors capital at the expense of the poor and the environment, even if it tends to be more productive and creative. It is indeed a difficult road ahead, and it is still quite unclear what the next transformation will be towards an economy controlled by the most disinterested, those with the “widest vision,” who can “appreciate the true value of things” and organize the collective material life for the sake of a universal well-being. Auroville and its citizens have the unique privilege of reflecting general trends, on the one hand, and the responsibility to take courageous decisions and actions to surpass them, on the other. Today’s issues in Auroville speak clearly of the global dilemma of money and power, while its innate purpose and essence speak always of change, promise, and the new millennium.

(Author’s note: This essay was written as an introduction to a study of Auroville’s economic development, 1999)

Auroville and the All USA Meeting 1999

AUROVILLE was founded by the Mother in 1968, near Pondicherry in south India, as an international township based on the spiritual philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. When we reported on the project's development ten years back, it had grown to a population of 500 adults and 150 children, from 23 countries. Today those numbers have more than doubled, with a current population of just under 1500 residents of 30 different nationalities. Though still far from the optimal 50,000 residents foreseen by the Mother, the township is clearly in a growth mode, and the future ideal city much easier to envision on the horizon.

The story of Auroville's remarkable achievements in environmental restoration and rural development is now well known, with more than two million trees reaching into the skies above a once deserted landscape. And the local village population – formerly limited to subsistence agriculture – finds itself actively engaged alongside an international community in all the many varieties of agriculture, cottage industries, infrastructure development, construction, community services, education and cultural creation necessary for the conduct of life in a budding, multicultural township. There are now approximately 80 settlements spread across the 20 square mile area, and as many small industries engaged in manufacture and marketing of such diverse products as incense, hand crafted clothing, computers, and biogas generators.

At the center of the township stands the Matrimandir, of which the Mother said, "The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection. Union with the Divine manifesting in a progressive human unity." Ten years ago we spoke of what the Matrimandir "will be" according to both the architectural vision and the spiritual purpose articulated by the Mother to those entrusted with its execution. Today the structure is virtually complete, and the inner chamber with its vastness of white marble, its glowing crystal sphere in the center, its extraordinary silence and power, is visited daily

by Aurovilians for meditation, and by increasing numbers of people on pilgrimage from all over India and the world.

In 1968, Dr. M.S. Adiseshiah, Deputy Director General of UNESCO, said of the hope that Auroville represents: "We have tried in UNESCO, we have tried in every way, and we have failed. And so now we turn to Auroville... On behalf of UNESCO, I hail Auroville, its conception and realization, as a hope for all of us and particularly our children, for our youth who are disillusioned with the world that we have built for them and who will find in Auroville a living symbol, inspiring them to live the life to which they are called." More recently, during a visit to Auroville earlier this year, Maurice Strong, Under Secretary General of the United Nations, and formerly Chairman of the Earth Summit, said: "I do not think humanity can survive much longer if there is not a civilizational change, a major social shift, which makes our higher motivations – our ethical, moral and spiritual motivations – and not our economic preoccupations the center of our lives, the prime driving force behind our economic and political systems. This is what you are doing in Auroville. ...For human unity and respect for the environment will never be realized on a global scale until it is realized first on the scale of individuals and communities. This is why I commend your efforts and why I am so happy to be here."

But there are still many challenges to be faced and obstacles to be overcome in order to realize the full potential of Auroville, and the dream of the Mother. One of the most pressing concerns the land on which Auroville is situated. Because of the relative slowness of the project's development – something that the Mother had wanted to go forward in a decade, but which is far from completion after three decades – much of the land still has not been purchased for Auroville. This leaves the project vulnerable to rising prices, land speculation, and encroachment of other interests. This will be the theme of a series of in-depth presentations to be made at various locations in the country during the summer by Guy Rykaert, a development specialist who has worked in Auroville since 1988. And it will be a central focus of the All USA Meeting of individuals and institutions dedicated to Auroville's development, which will be held in Crestone Colorado from August 7th

to 11th this year. The AUM is held annually at one of several locations across the US and features current Auroville speakers and issues.

For more information on Auroville, on the coming presentations on "Securing the Body of Auroville," in your area, or on organizations which support Auroville, please contact any of the following:

Auroville International-USA info@aviusa.org (mailto:AVIUSA@aol.com)

Auroville International -
Auroville, Tamilnadu, India, 605101 www.auroville.org

Integral Yoga and Sri Aurobindo Centers www.collaboation.org

Photographs

the Mother and Sri Aurobindo



AUROVILLE 1968-1990 PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

MATRIMANDIR



AUROVILLE 1968-1990 PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

LAND REJUVENATION



AUROVILLE 1968-1990 PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

MATRIMANDIR



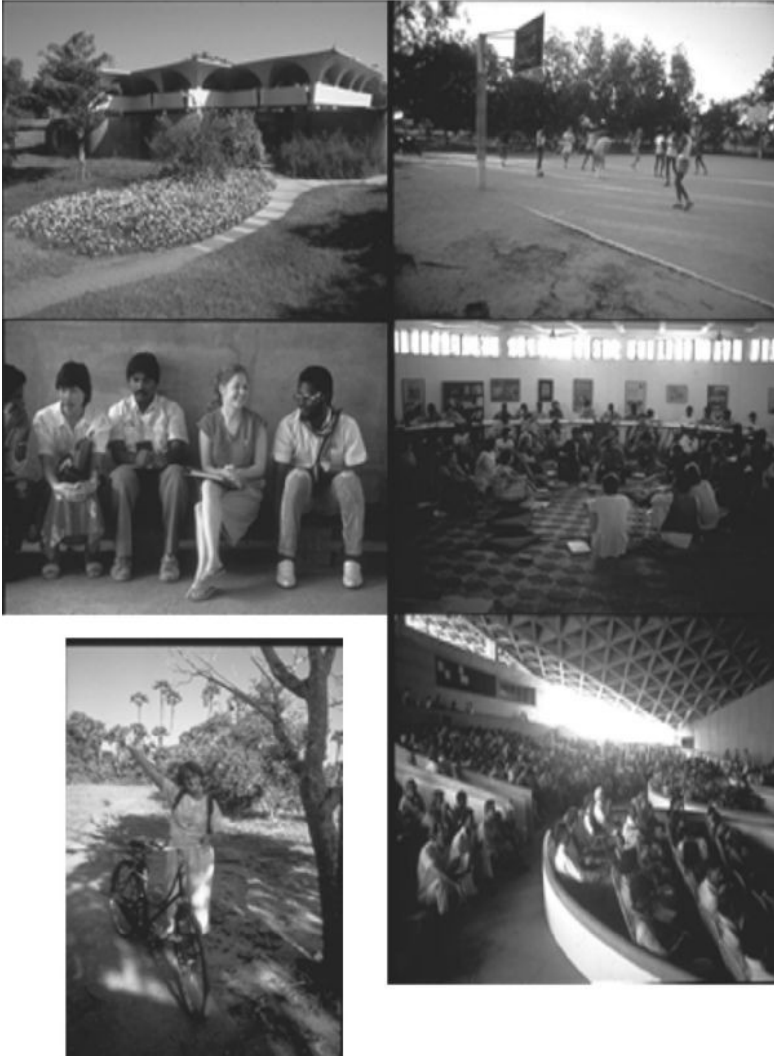
AUROVILLE 1968-1990 PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

RESIDENTIAL



AUROVILLE 1968-1990 PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

SOCIAL & CULTURAL



Project Proposal – Water Conservation and Resource Development in Auroville

The purpose of this proposal is to create a water research and development project in Auroville that will positively impact Auroville's future development while providing a model of water resource management for the region. AVI-USA, through its American Pavilion student exchange and professional consultation programs, is now ideally positioned to undertake the coordination and funding of such an intensive water research project in Auroville.

The first phase of this project will therefore entail planning, design, and fund raising to enable research teams to visit Auroville and, in consultation with the Auroville community and its water resource experts, to collect and analyze current data, study development projections for Auroville and its regional environment, and design a system of water catchment, storage, delivery, and utilization that will enable Auroville to realize its optimal long-range growth projections in an environmentally sustainable manner. Such a development study and its implementation by the Auroville community will provide crucial principles and technologies for India and the world at large at a time of increasing world-wide water shortages, pollution, and waste that threaten to destabilize human communities everywhere.

Auroville's early history of reforestation was the first successful stage of a necessary water resource development strategy that has already radically transformed the local environment while providing a model of conservation ecology for the region. It is now essential to carry this development to its logical conclusion for the sake of Auroville's optimal sustainable growth. And, because of the water crisis that is mounting throughout the world, it is an ideal opportunity for Auroville's example to dramatically impact development policies and practices elsewhere in the world.

To put this proposal in global perspective, several articles published in

prominent journals during 2002, by such eminent authorities as Lester Brown, E. O. Wilson, and Vandana Shiva, have been reviewed in the context of a standard American college course in microeconomics. The conclusions to be drawn from these comparisons and the context they provide should make the urgency of the situation resoundingly clear to anyone with an ear to hear. The economists and environmentalists of the world, and the young entrepreneurs and leaders who are their proteges, are on an apparent collision course that is threatening the survival of human society and at the same time indicating choices that must be made. Auroville may be able to provide a crucial forum for dialogue, resolution, and change, at a most critical time.

Appendices: 1) The Bottleneck, 2) The Economy of the Earth, 3) The Commodification of the World's Water

Article 1: The Bottleneck

"The Bottleneck" is an excerpt from the recently published book, *The Future of Life*, by E. O. Wilson, which appears in the February 2002 issue of *Scientific American* (p. 83-91). This article might have been titled, somewhat more dramatically, "The Challenge of Human Survival," or more pedantically, "The Principles of Environmental Economics." It is an attempt by an eminent sociobiologist to alert us to the pressing dangers of the current level of exponential population growth on a planet with resources already stretched beyond reasonable limits.

The context for the article's general premise is illustrated by the concept of the "ecological footprint" as follows: "The ecological footprint – the average amount of productive land and shallow sea appropriated by each person in bits and pieces from around the world for food, water, housing, energy, transportation, commerce, and waste absorption – is about one hectare (2.5 acres) in developing nations but about 9.6 hectares (24 acres) in the U.S. The (average) footprint for the total human population is 2.1 hectares (5.2 acres). For every person in the world to reach present U.S. levels of consumption with existing technology would require four more planet Earths."

Such a concept of absolute limits and global disparities seems to put the basic microeconomics principle of scarcity in an unusually vivid perspective. Human desires not only exceed available resources; it is impossible within the actual limits of Earth's resources for nearly four-fifths of the human population to satisfy more than one-fifth of the wants that are already being satisfied by the privileged minority. The image of the bottleneck symbolizes the idea that the burgeoning human population cannot possibly get through the narrow passage of dwindling available resources, at current rates of population growth and resource consumption. The environmentalist here formally puts the economist on notice: "The appropriation of productive land – the ecological footprint – is already too large for the planet to sustain, and it is growing larger."

The body of the article consists of a variety of illustrations of these two fundamental problems and major principles that Prof. Wilson thinks an environmental, "real world," economics must consider: human population growth and resource depletion. China provides the most dramatic paradigm for understanding both issues. For example, Wilson points out that, "During 1950-2000 China's people grew by 700 million, more than existed in the entire world at the start of the industrial revolution. ...In 1997 a team of scientists, reporting to the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC), predicted that China will need to import 175 million tons of grain annually by 2025. Extrapolated to 2030, the annual level is 200 million tons – the entire amount of grain exported annually in the world at the present time." Assuming that these figures are accurate, another fundamental principle of microeconomic theory jumps into vivid perspective here: opportunity cost or foregone benefit. In order to feed China's population in just another generation, all other factors remaining equal, it will be necessary to deny every other people the amount of grain that they lack under present conditions. Most of Africa's population, and much of the Middle-East and Europe, all who now import grain in fact, would be required to give up life – a benefit not lightly foregone to be sure.

The major cause of China's food deficit is its diminishing water resources.

The examples given convey the extremity of the problem. "Starting in 1972, the Yellow River Channel has gone bone dry almost yearly through part of its course in Shandong Province... In 1997 the river stopped flowing for 130 days, then restarted and stopped again for a record total of 226 dry days. Because Shandong Province normally produces a fifth of China's wheat and a seventh of its corn, the failure of the Yellow River is of no little consequence. ...Between 1965 and 1995 the water table fell 37 meters (121 feet) beneath Beijing itself. ...Of China's 617 cities, 300 already face water shortages. ...China has in all 50,000 kilometers of major rivers. Of these, according to the U.N.F.A.O., 80 percent no longer support fish. The Yellow River is dead along much of its course, so fouled with chromium, cadmium, and other toxins from oil refineries, paper mills, and chemical plants to be unfit for either human consumption or irrigation."

In addition to radically diminishing water resources, there is competition between industrial and agricultural uses for the water, and agriculture loses out. "A thousand tons of fresh water yields a ton of wheat, worth \$200, but the same amount of water in industry yields \$14,000. As China, already short on water and arable land, grows more prosperous through industrialization and trade, water becomes more expensive. The cost of agriculture rises correspondingly, and unless the collection of water is subsidized, the price of food also rises. This is in part the rationale for the great dams at Three Gorges and Xiaolangdi, built at enormous public expense." What are the microeconomic principles at work here?

Increased income due to industrial development has resulted in increased demand for preferred goods such as meat instead of grains and vegetables, and for more industrial products, all of which drive up the cost of water and food. Increased income yields increased demand.

On the supply side, however, increased cost of resources like water and food, due to technological inputs, subsidies, and competition, does not yield a substantial or proportionate increase in supply. It appears that the conventional principles of supply, by which an increase in water and food production would be predicted, cannot apply under conditions of

such extreme shortages. They may in fact be negated by what amounts to an absolute limit with respect to certain necessary (desired) resources. Restrictions on water consumption are applied, technological inputs added, prices increased, trade-offs accepted, and still the supply continues to diminish.

An optimistic scenario might be envisioned on the basis of the concepts of absolute and comparative advantage, whereby the U.S. and its trade partners who have stable water resources and agricultural surplus, and who would clearly have an absolute advantage with respect to agricultural export, might enter into a long-term trade partnership with China, which would probably have a comparative advantage in the production of minerals, electrical devices, textiles, etc. But even then the water supply is not likely to be adequate to sustain China's exponential population growth and increased production.

Although the concept of exponential population growth is mentioned as the fundamental problem for humanity as a whole, the term is not well defined in Wilson's article. Yet the point is made well enough. Wilson writes, "...people born in 1950 were the first to see the human population double in their lifetime, from 2.5 billion to over six billion now. During the 20th century more people were added to the world than in all of previous human history. ...When *Homo sapiens* passed the six-billion mark we had already exceeded by perhaps as much as 100 times the biomass of any large animal species that ever existed on the land. We and the rest of life cannot afford another 100 years like that."

In spite of the extreme seriousness of the problem, which is amply illustrated by the information that Wilson provides, and his assessment of the human bias against adopting long-term solutions to problems, ("...it is a hardwired part of our Paleolithic heritage"), he suggests in this article that China may be able to accelerate "its life-saving shift to industrialization and megahydrological engineering," and "a universal environmental ethic is the only guide by which humanity and the rest of life can be safely conducted through the bottleneck." Such glimmers of optimism do not sit well with statements in the same pages that are

better supported by the facts, such as, "China deserves close attention... because it is so far advanced along the path to which the rest of humanity seems inexorably headed." It seems to me that a better conclusion to be drawn within the context of this article – and it may be drawn in the book from which the article is taken – is that the human species must adopt an economics of sustainability based upon absolute resource limits, and voluntarily accept severe universal limits on population growth – or else.

Many of the issues raised by Wilson are pertinent in the context of microeconomic theory and in relation to material covered in the popular university text *Economics Today* (2001-2002). It is particularly interesting to see up-to-date statistics such as those concerning China brought together in a popular article on economics and the environment. The subject of the limits to growth with respect to population and resources has, however, been covered extensively and more adequately by other authors, such as Dennis Meadows in *Beyond the Limits* (1992). The subject of water resource depletion on a global scale deserves considerably more emphasis and elaboration.

Article 2 – The Economy of the Earth

"The Economy of the Earth" by Lester R. Brown is the feature article in the February/March, 2002 issue of *Mother Earth News*, pp. 22-32, and is excerpted from the book *Eco-economy, Building an Economy for the Earth*, (2001). As founder and director of the Worldwatch Institute in 1974, and editor of its annual State of the World Report since 1984, Brown has at his disposal a comprehensive archive of research material on the environment from which to draw in order to build the arguments featured in this article and in his new book. The premise is that the world economy is in fundamental conflict with the Earth's ecosystems, causing a steadily increasing deterioration of the natural capital on which the economy depends. The only way to avoid economic collapse as a result of widespread environmental disasters is to bring economics into realistic alignment with the needs and limitations of the natural world. Brown suggests that this would amount to a revolution in thinking

similar to the Copernican Revolution. It would require us to see the economy as a subset of the environment rather than the other way around. Such a reversal of perspective would make possible a more realistic appraisal by economists of the actual costs of a world economy that has grown sevenfold in just the past fifty years and has resulted in a grain/land productivity increase during that period greater than in the entire previous 11,000 years of agricultural production. Some of the negative effects of such a rapid explosion in the production and consumption of goods that he points to include: climate change, global warming, ice cap melting, increased annual storm damage, collapsing fisheries due to overfishing of the Earth's waters, water table depletion, top soil depletion, deforestation, species extinction, etc., etc. And of course, the underlying major problem is the human population explosion, which has produced more human beings in the past fifty years than in the previous 4 million years of human life on Earth. What, then, does he propose that economists do differently?

"The problem is that the market place fails to tell the ecological truth. It regularly underprices products and services by failing to incorporate the environmental costs of providing them." An example that is given to illustrate the discrepancy between economic costs and total actual costs to the environment is coal fired electricity. "The cost of coal fired electricity includes building the power plant, mining the coal, transporting it to the power plant and distributing electricity to consumers. What it does not include is the cost of climate disruption caused by carbon emissions from coal burning... Nor does it include the damage to freshwater lakes and forests from acid rain, or the health care costs of treating respiratory illnesses caused by air pollution. Thus the market price of coal-fired electricity greatly understates its cost to society." Another example that is given of "a market that is not telling the truth" is oil processing: "when buying a gallon of gasoline, customers in effect pay to get the oil out of the ground, refine it into gasoline, and deliver it to the pump. But they do not pay the health care costs of treating respiratory illnesses from air pollution or the costs of climate disruption, or military costs of protecting our oil supplies." Another cost

that he doesn't mention is habitat disruption and environmental pollution as a result of the exploitation of oil reserves.

The solution that he proposes is that environmental scientists and economists work together to calculate the cost of so-called "externalities" such as climate disruption, acid rain, air pollution, etc., and that these costs be added as a tax on the respective products, which would give the full cost. If this principle were applied to all economic activity it would form the basis for a restructuring of the economy in balance with the Earth. One result would be, in the area of power generation, the widespread replacement of coal with wind and hydrogen powered electricity; and with respect to gasoline engines, a far greater reliance on mass transit systems, hydrogen fuel cells, and bicycle transportation. The increased costs of harmful energy technologies would lead to the choice of their many safer substitutes by a better informed citizenry and more highly taxed industry. In the book from which the article is taken, Brown states this solution even more emphatically: "Unless we are prepared to shift taxes from income to environmentally destructive activities, such as carbon emissions and the wasteful use of water, we will not succeed in building an eco-economy" (p.82).

In Chapter 22 of the widely used college text, *Economics Today*, there are a few outstanding examples of the lack of information of the sort that Brown says would be so essential to a significant change in economic practices. For example, in the discussion of economies of scale, we read: "The larger the scale of the enterprise, the more the firm is able to take advantage of larger-volume (output capacity) types of machinery. Small scale operations may not be able profitably to use large-volume machines that can be more efficient per unit of output. ...the firm may experience economies of scale, which means that equal percentage increases in output result in a decrease in average cost. Thus output can double, but total costs will less than double; hence average cost falls" (p.551). The advantages to be gained by such an expansion of production is of course profit maximization. As we read earlier in the same chapter, this is the fundamental and apparently exclusive driving

principle of this school of economics: "In general, investors are indifferent about the details of how a firm uses the money they provide. They are most interested in the earnings on this money and the risk of obtaining lower returns or losing the money they have invested. Firms that can provide relatively higher risk-corrected returns will therefore have an advantage in obtaining the financing needed to continue or expand production. Over time we would expect a policy of profit maximization to become the dominant mode of behavior for firms that survive" (p.535).

And finally, from this same chapter, in the discussion of implicit costs and opportunity costs, it is suggested that "economic profits" should include a calculation of all explicit and implicit costs. Though it appears that some room is made by this concept for the kind of considerations that Brown calls attention to, the concept appears never to actually extend beyond the immediate costs of machinery, land, etc., involved for the purpose and to the extent required for producing the specific product. "Economists are more interested in how firm managers react not just to changes in explicit costs but also to changes in implicit costs, defined as expenses that business managers do not have to pay out of pocket but are costs to the firm nonetheless because they represent an opportunity cost. These are non-cash costs – they do not involve any direct cash outlay by the firm and must therefore be measured by the alternative cost principle. That is to say, they are measured by what the resources (land, capital) currently used in producing a particular good or service could earn in other uses. Economists use the opportunity cost of all resources (including both implicit and explicit costs) as the figure to subtract from revenues to obtain a definition of profit" (p.532-533). Why shouldn't the costs of soil erosion, flooding, forest replacement, animal habitat disruption, and human population displacement be included in the implicit costs of forest cutting and big dam building enterprises according to this principle of implied costs? However, there is no mention of such considerations in the text and such "external" costs are obviously excluded in the interests of investors and the principle of profit maximization. In other words, the truth is withheld for the sake of

the fundamental principles of this “economics.” But Brown is right, within this school’s own definitions, by suggesting that the inclusion of such costs through taxation would certainly have the effect of shifting the focus of production to methods that could be both more profitable for investors and more environmentally sustainable.

There are many aspects of the theory of an eco-economy, and of the critique of the prevalent economics, that are not discussed in this brief article-excerpt but that are covered in more detail in Brown’s original text. And, in addition, the book provides an extensive projection of design alternatives that make the restructuring of the present fossil fuel based economy seem feasible and attractive, although it would require radical changes in best practices in many basic areas of production and organization, such as agriculture, transportation, energy, and urban infrastructure. The background information on environmental disruption and the unsustainability of our current economy is convincing, however, and it is an unfortunate harbinger of future catastrophe that the undergraduate course doesn’t include such readings as a requirement and that the conventional text does not seriously discuss such critical concerns.

Article 3 – The Commodification of the World’s Water

In the Spring 2002 issue of *Earth Island Journal*, under the section heading The Commodification of the World’s Water, a feature article appears titled WATER INCORPORATED, by Maude Barlow, pp.30-31. The two primary problems identified by this author are the absolute limits of global freshwater and the privatization and marketing of water through international trade agreements. She writes: “Global consumption of water is doubling every 20 years – more than twice the rate of human population growth. According to the United Nations, more than one billion people on Earth already lack access to fresh drinking water. If current trends persist, by 2025 the demand for fresh water will rise by 56 percent and as many as two-thirds of the world’s population will be living with serious water shortages or absolute water scarcity. ...More than 30 countries already face water stress and scarcity. The Earth’s

water system can support, at most, only one more doubling of demand, estimated to occur in less than 30 years.”

These issues are pertinent in the context of the one short chapter on environmental economics in the text *Economics Today, 2001-2002*, especially with respect to its concepts of: 1) natural resource conservation, and 2) the privatization of natural resources. And it is interesting to note that, in an earlier chapter, the severe water shortages being experienced in China, and a suggested market response, were treated in some detail. There, in the introduction to Chapter 3, it says: “Of China’s 600 largest cities, half are running short of water. Some cities turn on water for general use by their residents only two hours per day. Each day, hundreds of farmers are finding their wells pumped dry. Nevertheless, annual rainfall levels in most of China have hovered within normal ranges.” Then, at the end of this chapter titled Demand and Supply, in a special section titled “China’s Water Shortage: Too little rain or not enough pricing?” two statements are made that help to put these issues in an interesting perspective: “Beijing...has already exhausted groundwater reserves and now takes irrigation water away from farmers. ...By thinking smaller and simply permitting the price of water to rise toward free-market levels, China could end its water shortage.” This is the textbook’s proposed market solution to the problem of resource depletion. And yet, we were also told that the water tables are exhausted even though rainfall is normal, and residential users are taking water from agricultural users. Doesn’t this mean that there is already not enough water to go around? And if so, then how can pricing possibly do anything more than favor some users against others?

Having established the context of absolute limits with respect to at least one region of the world, the next issue raised by Maude Barlow concerns another market solution to the problem: privatization and commodification of water. She writes: “As the water crisis intensifies, governments worldwide – under pressure from multinational corporations – are advocating the commodification and mass transportation of water. Proponents of water privatization say that a market system is the only way to distribute water to the world’s thirsty.

But experience shows that selling water on the open market does not address the needs of poor, underserved people.”

An example is given of one such plan that is underway. The US Global Water Corp, a Canadian company, has signed an agreement with Sitka, Alaska, to export 18 billion gallons of glacier water per year to China. It would then be bottled for export in one of China’s “free trade” zones to take advantage of cheap labor. The company brochure entices investors to “harvest the accelerating opportunity as traditional sources of water around the world become progressively depleted and degraded.”

Another example that she gives is of an application of this solution that failed. “In January 2000, thousands of citizens of Cochabamba, Bolivia, took to the streets to oppose the takeover of their water systems by a company jointly owned by the US based multinational Bechtel and the Italian utility Edison. The rebellion, which shut the city down for four days, was sparked after the foreign-owned water corporation raised Cochabamba’s water rates 35 percent. ...Bechtel was forced to abandon its Bolivian water privatization scheme. ...An international “civil summit” of farmers, workers, indigenous people, students, professionals, environmentalists, educators and non-governmental organizations from Bolivia, Canada, India, Brazil, and the US, subsequently gathered in Cochabamba to combine forces in the defense of the vital right to water.”

It is clear from this article that the author opposes the commodification of water on two fronts. She sees international free trade agreements, a number of which she describes, being used to favor the market interests of large corporations against both government and local control over this vital natural resource, and she seems to understand that these market strategies will not ultimately solve the problems of either absolute scarcity or of the local, equitable distribution of a common resource. However, the fundamental issue of resource scarcity is not examined in detail and no information is provided in this article concerning possible ecological approaches to solving the water scarcity problem.

Although the microeconomics textbook does not consider the problem of absolute scarcity of a vital resource such as water, it does present a number of assumptions concerning common property, privatization, and the limits of natural resources. In Chapter 31, it says, for example, "Periodically, the call for recycling focuses on the necessity of saving scarce resources because we are "running out." There is little evidence to back up this claim because virtually every natural resource has fallen in price over the past century. ...Indeed the real price of food fell by more than 30 percent for the major agricultural commodities during the 1980s and even more during the 1990s. A casual knowledge of supply and demand tells you that because the demand for food did not decrease, supply must have increased faster than demand" (p. 771). We have seen above, however, that in fact demand for water has grown faster than nature can supply it through the processes of rain and the recharge of groundwater.

Another example that is given in the same chapter of the textbook to support the idea of the positive impact of market forces on the environment concerns logging and paper manufacture. "...some economists argue that recycling does not necessarily save total resources. For example, recycling paper products may not necessarily save trees... Because most trees are planted specifically to produce paper, a reduction in the demand for trees will mean that certain land now used to grow trees will be put to other uses" (p. 770). This argument totally overlooks the ecological role of trees in groundwater recharge cycles, or of any essential relationship between trees and anything else except paper.

And the textbook suggests that privatization of such 'common property' as air and water can be a solution to pollution and overuse. "Basically, pollution occurs where we have poorly defined private property rights, as in air and common bodies of water. ...Where private property rights exist, individuals have legal recourse to any damages sustained through the misuse of their property. When private property rights are well defined, the use of property – that is the use of resources – will generally involve contracting between the owners of those resources" (p.766). The

ecological argument concerning common property such as air and water is, of course, that it cannot be divided up and owned in the first place, although the land on which it is accessed may be. And once it is polluted or depleted it is of no use to anyone anyway. Therefore it is not a “commodity” and it has no “substitutes” even though the market might like to treat it as though these concepts applied.

Neither the article by Barlow, nor the microeconomics textbook, examines such issues in depth or from the ecological point of view. For that, it is necessary to turn to an expert, such as Vandana Shiva, a well-known nuclear physicist and environmental activist in India, who has recently written a book titled *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit* (2002). She is also the author of such books as *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics*; *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*; and *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*. In her recent book on water scarcity and economics, she clearly defines the issues that we have been considering: “Everyone agrees that the world is facing a severe water crisis. Water-abundant regions have become water scarce, and water scarce regions face water famines. There are, however, two conflicting paradigms for explaining the water crisis: the market paradigm and the ecological paradigm. The market paradigm sees water scarcity as a crisis resulting from the absence of water trade. If water could be moved and distributed freely through free markets, this paradigm holds, it would be transferred to regions of scarcity, and higher prices would lead to conservation. ...Market assumptions are blind to the ecological limits set by the water cycle and the economic limits set by poverty. Over-exploitation of water and disruption of the water cycle create absolute scarcity that markets cannot substitute with other commodities. The assumption of substitution is in fact central to the logic of commodification. ...Such abstract arguments miss the crucial point – when water disappears, there is no alternative. For Third World women, water scarcity means traveling longer distances in search of water. For peasants, it means starvation and destitution as drought wipes out their crops. For children, it means dehydration and death. There is simply no

substitute for this precious liquid, necessary for the biological survival of animals and plants. ...The water crisis is an ecological crisis with commercial causes but no market solutions" (p. 14-15).

It has been amply illustrated in these articles, it seems to me, that the current theories of microeconomics manage to overlook certain scientific realities of the world in which markets currently operate – such as population growth and absolute resource limits. To consider substantial and critical gains and losses due to these factors mere "externalities," as the textbook defines them, is to explain away real gains and losses, real opportunity costs, and real limitations of the natural capital on which all markets depend, with a sleight of hand and a falsification. And I believe a strong case can be made for the probability that the current principles of this "market economics" will become obsolete in the not-distant future because of the pressing realities that it chooses to ignore.

Spirituality in Healing

Foundations of a General Theory and Practice

(For schools, mental health centers, corporations, etc.)

1. Metaphysical glimpses of the possibilities of the Self

As we consider the prospects of a spiritual life program to enhance healing and wholeness, I would like to share a point of view that I have reached, based on years of study and practice, which may be useful. This, at least, is where my thinking is today. As we continue to learn and grow, we may hope to be capable of a continually deeper, wider, truer grasp of what such an undertaking means. For the moment, however, this is the way that I would formulate in broad general terms a basic understanding of the value of spirituality in healing.

The assumptions that naturally form the basis of a theory and practice of spirituality in healing must be taken from two primary sources: ancient tradition and modern research. In this section I will outline some of the assumptions from ancient traditions that I believe are most valuable, concerning the Self. Since this is a non-sectarian undertaking, I think it will be helpful to look at a variety of traditions. My own experience and preference lead me to focus on three such traditions: Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist.

In the Upanishads, perhaps the most ancient scriptural tradition, there are a few lines that I believe open the discussion appropriately:

1. The breath of things is an immortal Life; but of this body ashes are the end.
2. He who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught. How shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere

oneness? (*The Upanishads*, Sri Aurobindo trans., 1981)

The basic assumptions that can be drawn from these lines are: 1) that there is a principle in our bodies and lives and in every living thing, something other than the organically visible operations of mind and body, which is invisible, immortal and essential – an underlying spiritual principle, spirit; 2) this universal principle is the basis of the experience of oneness, spoken of by all spiritual traditions, and it is available to direct experience because it is in us, it is our real self, the fundamental nature of our being, and of all being. The assumptions are, again, that we are all this one spiritual essence, it is knowable, and knowing it has the effect of immunizing us from delusion and suffering. (This is of course also the basic principle of Buddhist teaching, as we shall see.)

The next set of phrases that I would like to draw attention to is from the New Testament. Jesus says, according to the gospel of John:

1. Whoever loves his own life (psuche-spirit) will lose it; whoever hates his own life (psuche) in this world will keep it for life (Zoe-subsistence) eternal.
2. I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper (parakleitos-counselor, advocate), the Spirit of Truth, to stay with you forever. ...I have told you this while I am still with you. The helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything I have said...Peace I leave with you; my own peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid. (The New Testament, Greek and English, 1966)

Whatever we may think or believe regarding Christ and Christianity, the message in this scripture is: 1) if we detach our sense of self, our spirit, from our everyday experience of life and the world, we may know another self that is eternal; 2) that self is capable of knowing all spiritual truth here and now, is present to everyone as a result of Christ's sacrifice, and is at peace in a way that isn't subject to the vicissitudes of life and world.

Finally, in a teaching presented by the Dalai Lama in San Jose a few years ago, which I had the privilege to attend, he restated the fundamental assumptions of Buddhism, as well as detailed teachings on the specific practice of yoga known as *dzogchen*, which may be summarized briefly as the “spontaneous arising of the clear light mind” (*rigpa*). This presentation was also the background to an “empowerment” (a ritual practice) meant to impart to an audience of both American lay novices and Tibetan Lamas, one of the highest secret teachings of his religion, which is the youngest of the traditions being considered here. This was a very comprehensive teaching, which lasted more than two days, and to capture even a significant portion of it takes a little more space than a simple scriptural passage would, for which I apologize. But it seems a relevant and important contribution to our theory in a variety of ways. He said:

Bodhichitta can be defined as an expansive state of mind that is attained as a result of training in two kinds of aspiration. One is an altruistic aspiration to benefit all sentient beings, an attitude of deep compassion. The other is the conviction that comes from reflecting on the suffering of all sentient beings and realizing that for as long as we do not attain the highest enlightenment, we will be handicapped and limited in our ability to fulfill our aspiration to benefit others. The state of mind that is induced through these twin aspirations is called bodhichitta, or the mind of enlightenment.

But it is not enough to be content with this aspiration alone. Now that altruistic ideal should be put into action, through the practices of the six perfections. In brief, the bodhisattva’s way of life or practice is the union of method or skillful means and wisdom. ‘Method’ here refers to practices like generating the altruistic mind of enlightenment, and allowing it to motivate you to engage in skillful means for helping others, such as generosity, pure morality, patience, enthusiasm, and concentration. ‘Wisdom’ here means to develop and reinforce your understanding of, and insight into, emptiness.

Practitioners begin by reflecting on the empty nature of the aggregates of body and mind. Then they dissolve into emptiness not only their ‘identity’ – the mode of being superimposed on them by the ignorant mind – but also the very appearance of the ordinary

aggregates of body and mind. Then, from within that emptiness, the practitioners arise as a pure, divine being. Taking that divine being as the focus of meditation, they then reflect again upon its empty nature. So here within one meditative state of mind you find meditation on the deity's body, combined with the apprehension of its empty nature. Both deity yoga and understanding of emptiness are complete and present within a single cognitive event of the mind.

...in Highest Yoga Tantra much emphasis is placed on dissolving conceptual thought processes – the coarse levels of mind – so bringing the mind down to such a depth that the fundamental innate mind of clear light becomes manifest and active, and then can focus on emptiness and perceive it. Once that is realized, then the subjective experience of emptiness becomes very powerful...Now, as I mentioned earlier, the significance of emphasizing the practice of clear light in Highest Yoga Tantra is to enable the practitioner to employ the fundamental innate mind of clear light for understanding and realizing emptiness, so that it can provide you with a unique wisdom – ‘the wisdom which realizes emptiness.’ (Dzogchen, 2000)

For Buddhism, the assumptions are that: 1) life is characterized by suffering because the mind is continually exposed to changing stimuli and grasps at reality through its emotions, sensations, thoughts and feelings that are essentially not real; and 2) the basic reality of self and world is a “fundamental innate mind of clear light” on the subjective side, and “emptiness” on the objective side, but an emptiness which is full of everything that exists – it is a non-dual, all pervasive reality of pure luminous consciousness.

This idea seems to me to reflect in a more pragmatic and psychological sense what was indicated in the Upanishad by the term Self, and by Jesus, variously in the gospels, as an Eternal Life, the Spirit of Truth (*pneuma tes aletheias*), the One, Light, Love, etc. In other words, these teachings are all speaking rather concretely about Spirituality. Something they seem to have in common is the idea that ordinary mentality, vitality, physicality and the complex interplay and values of life in the fragmented, mentalized world we usually experience do not constitute the whole picture or the true picture, but are a portion and

partial reflection of something else that contains and fills them, and that can also be known. Moreover, knowing that “something else” is liberating and empowering in a way that no other experience can be – it is wholeness itself and a sense of identity that is both unique and all encompassing.

The basic assumptions of traditional spirituality are that it is possible to realize the greater reality of the self, because that is the true nature of existence, and also to live that reality in a way that liberates both oneself and others. I think here also of Plato’s philosophy of the Good, which underlies much of western culture, as a kind of divine essence that is flowing through everything and leading it to its fullness and truth. In us it translates, perhaps, as the need and the will to heal and to be whole.

2. Empirical glimpses of the possibilities of Self

In my own experience, the underlying spiritual nature of reality is a confirmed truth. I have spent more than ten years living in India and practicing Integral Yoga, in a yoga community of several thousand people from all over the world. Through the practice learned there, I discovered the means to access the experience of Self that I believe is being referred to in the traditional teachings mentioned above. During the past ten years in Colorado I have led numerous week-long workshops in Crestone where I have been a director of the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center. These workshops are usually attended by fifteen or twenty people, sometimes more and sometimes fewer. And at the end of the week of study, meditation, relaxation, and physical exercise, it has always been the experience of those attending that they had acquired a rejuvenating sense of detachment, fullness of spirit, the experience of a divine unity in themselves and nature, and a fortification for returning to the everyday world in a more creative, energized frame of mind and body.

During these workshops in Integral Yoga, we have also frequently practiced Zazen at the Mountain Zen Center, where Baker Roshi is the abbot, and worshipped at the Carmelite Chapel with Father Dave Denny and Mother Tessa Bielecki. And we have participated in fire ceremonies

at the Haidakhandi Universal Ashram, which is a more traditional Hindu temple and religious center in Crestone. Crestone is an ecumenical spiritual community where it is possible to actually practice several of the world's faiths with an authentic community of believers.

Having had these experiences, I recognize that it is still necessary to ask whether the "experience" of the divine Self, and of universal love and oneness, means that this is the true nature of ourselves and of Reality? Is the Buddhist's "innate mind of clear light" the fundamental nature of existence, or only the momentary experience of the practitioner? The skeptic in us has to admit that even though such experiences are real and effective ones, whether they are "universal and eternal truths" which underlie all existence, effective at all times, remains a matter of faith. This is the question of "spiritual" faith, as opposed to "religious" faith, which might be concerned with, for example, faith in Christ as the Savior, God as the Creator, or an Indian saint like Sri Ramakrishna as the reincarnation of the Lord of Love. When one has the experience of universal love and truth, it is certainly desirable to believe that it is an absolute, and that everyone can realize it, but such a hope and belief, however experientially based, will probably always remain a matter of faith, as opposed to demonstrable certainty.

The fact that spirituality is as experiential and effective as mentality, vitality, and physicality, however, is of the utmost importance. It is a potential of the human experience and it is as valuable, perhaps more valuable, than any other experience. And it has measurable results.

For example, Dr. Harold Koenig at Duke University, a medical doctor interested in faith and healing, has documented numerous studies and experiments over the past twenty years, some of which have appeared in the American Journal of Psychiatry and elsewhere. These studies show that, for example, 40% of people with life threatening diseases believe that faith was the most important factor in coping with their illness. Regular religious practice has led to a 50% lower rate of depression in mental patients. There is a 30-50% lower rate of alcoholism among religious practitioners, depending on age. And suicide rates are inversely

proportionate to church attendance. For example, black women in America have the highest church attendance and the lowest number of suicides. (*The Healing Power of Faith*, 1999)

In a similar study by Dale Matthews, also a medical doctor, an interesting comparison is made between spirituality and religion, based on clinical statistics. He writes: "Some scientific studies indicate that people who are spiritual within the framework of religiosity – those whose religious involvement is accompanied by an inwardly experienced and highly personal awareness of God – derive the greatest benefit from the faith factor. For example, in the study of patients undergoing open-heart surgery conducted by Thomas Oxman, M.D., regular churchgoers were three times more likely to survive the surgery than non-church attenders. But within the pool of churchgoers, thirty-seven of the patients described themselves as obtaining significant "strength and comfort" from religious practices, and all of these patients survived the six-month period." (*The Faith Factor*, 1998)

Dr. Matthews infers, however, that "frequency of worship-service attendance is the bellwether religious variable," and he lists twelve factors, or qualities of life, that such collective worship is believed to contribute to the individual's sense of well-being: 1) Equanimity-overcoming the wear and tear of life; 2) Temperance-honoring the body as a temple of the spirit; 3) Beauty-appreciating art and nature; 4) Adoration-worshipping with our whole being; 5) Renewal-confessing and starting over; 6) Community-bearing one another's burdens; 7) Unity-gaining strength through shared beliefs; 8) Ritual-taking comfort in familiar activities; 9) Meaning-finding a purpose in life; 10) Trust-letting go and letting God; 11) Transcendence-connecting with ultimate hope; 12) Love-caring and being cared for.

The role of "ritual" in relief from pain and ultimate recovery among medical patients has been especially emphasized in a book titled *Transpersonal Medicine* (1996), written by Dr. Frank Lawlis, a clinical psychologist, who collaborates in this book with various well-known practitioners such as Larry Dossey, Barbara Dossey, Dean Ornish, etc.

Lawlis's findings also support with clinical evidence all of the values, cited by Matthews, that are to be gained from spiritual practice. This study is perhaps the most significant in the context of a non-sectarian program, because the author derives common beliefs and practices from a variety of traditions and incorporates them into a generic, non-sectarian approach to spiritual healing, which he practices in a clinical setting. In his definition of transpersonal medicine, he neatly draws together the elements of spirituality and healing that we have been considering: "The underlying principle of transpersonal medicine is that power in sources from beyond the self or beyond what we ordinarily consider consensual reality is available to be drawn upon and used to help heal ourselves and others."

Lawlis focuses on "ritual" as the primary healing tool to be derived from religious traditions and applied to the healing process. The effects of ritual that he attributes most directly to the healing process are four: 1) rituals increase the sense of connectedness, which has a direct "positive effect on such variables as surgical recovery time, resistance to infectious disease, ulcers, and general stress responses;" 2) rituals encourage hope, and hopelessness is directly related to stress and stress management; 3) rituals extend influence beyond the normal psychological influence, as demonstrated by the positive results of intentionality in interpersonal groups that focus healing energies on others; 4) ritual creates conditions necessary to transformation, by honoring, encouraging, and celebrating the process of breaking with old patterns and making positive life transitions.

The universal pattern of ritual that Lawlis describes has four essential dimensions and processes: 1) Awareness of universality, expansion of the sense of self, which can be accomplished through study of scripture, sharing of visions and histories, through music, art, and analysis; 2) Severance, separation or distancing from ordinary routines, circumstances, and self-concepts, through prayer, silence, meditation, "death"; 3) Transition, entering into another state of consciousness through dream, symbolic imagery, chanting, hypnosis, revelation, "rebirth"; 4) Return, reuniting with the group, sharing, celebrating,

focusing intention, formal blessing, assuming new creative roles.

The environmental requirements for this process to be optimally effective according to Lawlis are 1) a sacred space, 2) a sense of safety, and 3) mutual intention, qualities which are inherent in religious practice by virtue of the temple, chapel, church or prayer hall, and by the mutually supportive, familiar congregation, all focused on a common belief, prayer, music, etc. One of the key factors in the healing phenomenon achieved by this structure is resonance – the attunement of the participants to an impersonal, transcendent, healing vibration.

In a non-sectarian environment, each of these elements can be easily reproduced. A simple space dedicated to spiritual practice, clean, wholesome, comfortable and quiet; a group of individuals who are reasonably compatible and volitionally inclined to be part of a ritual process of awakening and renewal; a pattern of supportive prayers, teachings, songs, chants, symbolic expressions that convey the intention of the group to experience unity, harmony, hope and love. The latter aspect of the structure might vary in a regular way among a variety of religious traditions and teachings, in order to avoid bias and also to educate the participants in a wider, more global view of religion. The main objective to be accomplished, according to all of the research quoted here, would be regularity of observance. And the main outcome to be achieved would be a renewed sense of hope and well-being. Faith in this possibility can be safely justified by both tradition and research.

A regular practice which successfully achieves liberation from the ego's sense of self, from the sense of being separate from the world it inhabits, and from the mind's conditioned thoughts and emotions, results in an identification with the vast emptiness of being. The impersonal intention, or will, that can then become active, both individually and collectively, is a divine will to bring all existence to its fullness and perfection. Carrying that intention from such a consecrated space into one's physical and mental daily life, or allowing it to radiate out to the transpersonal, unified self-in-all, can result in transformations of the quality of life for both ourselves and others. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in

The Synthesis of Yoga, "By equality of the heart we get away from the troubled desire-soul on the surface, open the gates of this profounder being, bring out its responses and impose their true divine values on all that solicits our emotional being" (p. 677).

Spirituality and the New Education

(A rather presumptuous conjunction. Perhaps we could change it to Yoga and Ecology?)

Not much better. How about The New Paradigm? Still very presumptuous I think. Do we at all know what these terms mean?

Perhaps we do, in fact. Let's presume that we do. You know and I know and we agree. So what I shall say is intended to merely affirm what we all know. And perhaps it will focus our knowing on a way that we can go forward, on a work that we have to do. It will offend no one's intelligence then. So...

1. Principles

We assume certain first principles. Evolutionary spirituality, Ecophilosophy, or ecosophy as Arne Naess sometimes calls it, is an outlook or world-view which recognizes that fundamentally everything in nature is interrelated, hierarchically, system within system; that as a whole, this ecosphere exhibits intelligence, is purposeful, prescient, able to evolve homeotetically; that this unified field can be known and explained intuitively and theoretically, and that such knowledge and understanding will lead to ethical positions in harmony with and respectful of all nature (if not gnostically one with it in an absolute way), and to actions which meaningfully further, rather than obstruct, the purposes of this vast, miraculous unity of which we are a part – Gaia – our Mother.

In Yoga, as we know, the little self, or Kshara Purusha, is enabled to transcend itself and widen into an identity with the larger, vaster Self of all, or Akshara Purusha, and then to rise beyond that vast motionless identity, into the all-creative Purushottama, the Divine Impulse itself in

and beyond all existence. I believe we can see a parallel developing here, between the ancient spiritual and the new material paradigms.

The Convention on Biodiversity ratified by the Nations at the Earth Summit, is a dramatic indication that such a new paradigm is in fact emerging, for it recognizes in very explicit language that the old 'exploit and prosper at the expense of anyone and anything' paradigm cannot work much longer, that all of humanity must cooperate to clean up the mess and help nature create for itself a different kind of world, if we are to survive.

This new paradigm therefore implies also a critical understanding of what is unhealthy, false, rigid, destructive, obsolete, if not yet in an absolute gnostic way, at least with critical certainty. And if you don't know these things adequately already, this faculty will necessarily develop gradually. For the new ecosophical paradigm is, I believe, necessarily critical. If things must change consciously, then a faculty able to discriminate between the value of what is and what is not, between the where we are and the where we are going, is an instrumental necessity. And this critical faculty of mind, if prevented from turning around in its own grooves by a larger unified vision, leads naturally into a higher, more synthetic principle of mind, and that into an 'overmind' consciousness which is able to see spontaneously the relative truth and purpose of every stage of development and every point of view, and to evaluate each in terms of its respective intention or goal. Through such an opening upward, Sri Aurobindo suggests, an as yet virtually unmanifest principle of Truth-Conscious Force, or Supermind, can descend and act to truly transform life.

The idea of an inspired critical mind forming the basis of a spiritual development is not new, of course. This is perhaps the essence of Buddhist practice, at least a significant part of it. For example, in the Dzogchen teaching of Vajrayana Tibetan Buddhism, an object such as a glass is considered, analyzed, scrutinised, the processes of perception and judgment analyzed, the form, function, substance, appearance logically categorized, in terms of space, time, energy, perception,

abstraction, fullness, emptiness, until finally the object appears to be in reality what it is not – a not glass, a vessel through which the clear light of understanding shines forth, in the emptiness and stillness of mind. *Sunyata*.

Similarly, the battle of Kurukshetra is revealed to Arjun in the teaching of Sri Krishna, not as a slaughter and infamy as Arjun imagines egoistically, but as a divinely ordained event led by the Divine Lord of Love himself, through which equality before all and supreme wisdom are attained. *Samata*.

And in ancient Greek philosophy the limited particular is known in reality to be the infinite ideal, Being in process of Becoming, the changeless *morphe*, or Form, determining the *hule*, or matter ever in motion. Aristotle's hylomorphism as we call it, is a preeminent example of the power of critical thought to lead to a spiritual vision of truth with respect to material things. All forms are finally caused by the idea of the Good, *idea tou agathou* This idea shaped Christian thought for more than a thousand years. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy it is called the Divine Supermind.

In text on the evolution of social development, extensively revised around 1940, Sri Aurobindo closely juxtaposes the critical and the spiritual vision, while speaking about the possible change from materialistic democracy and socialism "with their ideas of liberty" to the next stage of civilization:

...instead of a harmoniously ordered society there has been developed a frantically rapid and one-sided development of industrialism, and under the garb of democracy, an increasing plutocratic tendency that shocks by its ostentatious grossness...this great parasitical excrescence of unbridled competition, this giant obstacle to any decent ideal or practice of human living.

But then he suggests a natural progression through which,

...to find by the loss of the ego the Self which is one in all and perfect and complete in each and by living in that to grow into the image of its perfection, ...individually, be it noted, though with an all-embracing

universality of the nature and its conscious circumference.

...a society which was even initially spiritualised would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in mankind the whole first aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure.

2. Methods

Education is a society's process of mirroring itself and maintaining continuity, and as such it is an instrument of culture and of evolution: it is both conservative and progressive. Perhaps we tend to think of it as a process especially of human societies, but it is probably a process of information transfer at different levels throughout nature. It is the way nature brings forth what it values in its succeeding generations. We attempt to do it more deliberately than other species perhaps, but with dubious success. At present our public schools often reflect and further the worst aspects of our social consciousness.

But if a new paradigm is emerging, then it becomes the primary responsibility of education to reflect it, define it, develop and further it in our own minds and lives, so that a new, necessary, inevitable reality may emerge as a dynamic bridge for new generations. We already have indications of the new curriculum: healthy physical bodies for everyone, healthy caring relationships throughout the world, purposeful, cooperative activities everywhere respectful of all nature, a humanity characterized by mental clarity, resilience, spontaneity, plasticity, luminosity, truth, harmony, beauty, joy.

It is an outlook, a vision, a necessary orientation which alone can correct the regressive, destructive outcomes now evident as the price of the last centuries of "development and progress." It is an outlook that naturally cultivates bodies and minds that are vehicles for drawing down light and transforming structures, making our lives and others everywhere with whom we are related, at all levels of Gaia, channels, paths, embodiments of a new dynamic, of new values, new relationships, new energies, new sensitivities, new creations.

Such an orientation and aim in education, requires that we focus on the development of all levels of the human being, and of all human beings equally, without social and cultural biases and discrimination. Often religion has been the instrument and at times the institutional bastion of social and cultural bias and discriminatory abuse. In this new age of globalization and interdependence, a new respect for humanity as a whole has emerged, and with it a new understanding of the inner-most truths of religion, which is to say the truths of religion as a whole. The human being is a physical, vital, mental, and spiritual being, capable of willing, and sacrificing for, the well-being of the whole, of which each one is part. This potential and capacity can best be realized by an integral and holistic education based on the inner-most truth of the one Self of all, and our highest ideals of mutual respect for the infinite diversity through which that Oneness is expressed.

Reviewing the Bush Doctrine

At the end of the week of September 16, 2002 the White House published a document titled *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002*, under the seal of the President of the United States and the personal signature of George Bush. It is this document that I am referring to here as the Bush Doctrine.

The document, which became available on the Internet on Friday, Sept. 20, consists of a four-page introduction and thirty-one pages of text, to which I will refer in this essay. It is a doctrine of unparalleled, and unchallengeable, worldwide power and prosperity. Let me quote some of the fundamental tenets.

The United States possesses unprecedented – and unequalled – strength and influence in the world. ...

In pursuit of our goals, our first imperative is to clarify what we stand for: the United States must defend liberty and justice...for all people everywhere. ...

We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends. Our response must be to take full advantage of strengthened alliances, the establishment of new partnerships with former adversaries, innovation in the use of military forces, modern technologies, including the development of an effective missile defense system, and increased emphasis on intelligence collection and analysis. ...

It is time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. We must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge. ...

The United States must and will maintain the capability to defeat any attempt by an enemy – whether a state or non-state actor – to impose its will on the United States, our allies, or our friends. ...Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States. ...

These statements define the general position of this doctrine with regard to the role of America's "military might" in the world. The other major arm of the doctrine concerns the role of America's "economic might."

This is also a time of opportunity for America. We will work to translate this moment of influence into decades of peace, prosperity, and liberty. The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests. ...

A strong world economy enhances our national security by advancing prosperity and freedom in the rest of the world. Economic growth supported by free trade and free markets creates new jobs and higher incomes. It allows people to lift their lives out of poverty, spurs economic and legal reform, and the fight against corruption, and it reinforces the habits of liberty. ...

The Administration's goal is to help unleash the productive potential of individuals in all nations. Sustained growth and poverty reduction is impossible without the right national policies. Where governments have implemented real policy changes, we will provide significant new levels of assistance. The United States and other developed countries should set an ambitious and specific target: to double the size of the world's poorest economies within a decade. *This is real freedom, the freedom for a person – or a nation – to make a living. ...*

In its relations with other nations, the procedural thrust of this two-fold doctrine is to develop and enhance military and economic alliances. The example of India is specifically addressed.

The United States has undertaken a transformation in its bilateral relationship with India based on a conviction that U.S. interests require a strong relationship with India. We are the two largest democracies, committed to political freedom protected by representative government. India is moving toward greater economic freedom as well. We have a common interest in the free flow of commerce, including through the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. Finally, we share an interest in fighting terrorism and in creating a strategically stable Asia. ...

The events of September 11, 2001, fundamentally changed the context

for relations between the United States and other main centers of global power, and opened vast, new opportunities. With our long-standing allies in Europe and Asia, and with leaders in Russia, India, and China, we must develop active agendas of cooperation lest these relationships become routine and unproductive. ...

The presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitments to allies and friends. Through our willingness to use force in our own defense and in defense of others, the United States demonstrates its resolve to maintain a balance of power that favors freedom. To contend with uncertainty and to meet the many security challenges we face, the United States will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces.

Students of the philosophy of human unity and world unity, as formulated by Sri Aurobindo, who have perhaps been reassured by the growing influence and integrity of the United Nations, will of course be sensitive to the tone of unilateralism, and to the extreme emphasis on the use of force, that resound throughout this document. The immediate context of the threat of war against Iraq by the United States, in which the document has been issued, also raises the possibility that this far-reaching doctrine of world military and economic dominance by the "great powers" may be nothing more than a pretext for launching an attack against one, small "rogue" state presumed to be pursuing Weapons of Mass Destruction. It is therefore important that we who have such concerns, as well as members of the U.S. Congress, members of the U.N.O., world governments, and concerned citizens everywhere, reflect critically for a moment on the deeper implications of this new Bush Doctrine. I suggest that critical thought should be focused primarily on the ideas expressed by this document on "force," "free-markets," and "freedom."

Force, Free Markets, and Freedom

The need of military force to ensure freedom and prosperity for the U.S. and the world is the dominant chord in this doctrine, which stems from

the attacks of September 11, and the issues of national security that were unleashed by that historic incident. Each of the nine sections of the doctrine has been headed by a quote from President Bush made in response to those attacks. They provide the current context and primary justification for the doctrine. But other historical arguments are also put forward as rationales.

For example, the assertion is made that the cold war has been won by the democratic capitalist ideology, and that this victory constitutes a culmination or apex of the historic struggles between freedom and tyranny that have characterized human civilization since the seventeenth century. It is this victory, and the common adoption of democratic principles and market economies, that constitute the unifying principle among the great powers. The inference is then made, as a cornerstone of this doctrine, that the use of force, on a worldwide scale, is justified by the need to ensure that the bastion of democratic/economic freedom is never again challenged.

The force that is being justified and authorized by this argument is the destructive force of arms. It is not the force of truth, or of right, of morality or of God, or even of an overwhelming joy of universal prosperity, even though these forces shall presumably be served. The force that is being invoked and authorized is the force to: "strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends; develop agendas for cooperative action with other main centers of global power; train and equip our forces and those of our allies to ensure that we can prevail in any conflict; take advantage of the technological opportunities and economies of scale in our defense spending to transform NATO military forces so that they dominate potential aggressors and diminish our vulnerabilities."

If the democratic capitalist ideology has in fact been victorious in the world, then one should ask whether such an enormous military force is any longer needed, much less more important to achieve than ever? And if such forces were deployed against adversaries, would their impact be likely to really strengthen the world economy and lead to

more democratic progress? Or might they not weaken the economies of the world and give rise to opposite political forces and wills? Is it possible to predict, on the basis of the immediate apparent successes of capitalism and the expanding world-market, that these principles of freedom and progress can be sustained indefinitely by either our current conceptions of democracy or our current market system?

In an essay titled *War and Self-Determination*, Sri Aurobindo raised two important considerations that should be borne in mind. He said, firstly: "Vain will be the mechanical construction of unity, if unity is not in the heart of the race and if it be made only a means for safeguarding and organizing our interests; the result will then be only, as it was in the immediate past, a fiercer strife and new outbreaks of revolution and anarchy." And, secondly: "Experience has so far shown us that the human attempt to arrive at a mechanical freedom has only resulted in a very relative liberty and even that has been enjoyed for the most part by some at the expense of others. ...Even the best machinery of this mechanical freedom yet discovered amounts to the unmodified will of a bare majority, or rather to its selection of a body of rulers who coerce in its name all minorities and lead it to issues of which it has itself no clear perception. ...These anomalies, – anomalies of many kinds are inseparable from the mechanical method, – are a sign that the real meaning of liberty has not yet been understood." (*The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, 1970, p. 597, 600)

A mechanical unity, in this case, is clearly one that is dependent on market structures protected by armed forces. It is not an inherent or in any way a natural or spontaneous unity with inviolable inner bonds, but one that is imposed from without and maintained by external means. The freedom that is thereby enabled, according to the doctrine, is the freedom to compete in peace for an economic prosperity, which so far has never been equitable either within a nation or among nations. The decade of the nineties and of economic globalization has in fact demonstrated most dramatically that whole national economies and political regimes can be easily destabilized, and millions of people's financial security undermined, by market fluctuations caused by the

actions of a few investors. Is the United States therefore justified by such volatile economic prospects in requiring that the world economy support a network for world military dominance for the purpose of protecting that market mechanism? And is the unfettered deployment of such force, for the destruction of either national regimes or bands of terrorists, sufficiently justified and counterbalanced by the promises of a globalized market economy as it now stands and is understood to function?

The free-market aspect of the Bush Doctrine states that the United States will work with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to “help emerging markets achieve access to larger capital flows” and “streamline the policy conditions for lending.” It will also “ensure that the WTO intellectual property rules are flexible enough” and “address new technology, science, and health regulations that needlessly impede farm exports and improved agriculture.” But isn’t it also a demonstrated fact of the last decade of free-market diplomacy that millions of agriculturists in countries like India have suffered from precisely these kinds of deregulatory interventions that benefit large corporations and developed markets at the expense of smaller players and providers? It is the stated belief of the Bush Doctrine that “free markets create new jobs and higher incomes, lift lives out of poverty, and spur economic and legal reform.” But the recent history of foreign citizens and workers along the U.S. border with Mexico, in Argentina, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, attest to the inequities and vulnerabilities of new free market economies. (For a detailed economic history of globalization in the nineties, see the documentary *Commanding Heights* by Daniel Yergin, et al., at <pbs.org>.)

Freedom cannot be reduced to the ability of peoples and nations to make a living, or to the virtually unlimited capacity of the great powers to dominate and protect the weak and less fortunate. And yet the Bush Doctrine asserts precisely this. And while it avows its allegiance to such world organizations as the EU and the UN, and extols the virtue of states that honor and abide by international law, it reserves for itself immunity and the right to act alone:

We will take the actions necessary to ensure that our efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans are not impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept.

We will disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations by: defending the United States, the American people, and our interests at home and abroad by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders. While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country; and denying further sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists by convincing or compelling states to accept their sovereign responsibilities.

This doctrine at once commits the United States to the protection, defense, and support of itself and its friends, while exempting its actions against its foes from any direct accountability to others. It is a unilateral declaration of independence from and superiority to any form of international consensus or cooperation, while assuming authority and responsibility for the international community as a whole. As the doctrine declares: "Today, the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs is diminishing." The U.S., by this doctrine of national security, incorporates the world in its mission to build and sustain the most powerful military force and economic order the world has ever known, under its sole leadership and dominance. It is a doctrine replete with questionable assumptions and dangerously presumptuous assertions. I encourage you to read it carefully and weigh its implications for humanity as a whole.

In the weeks immediately following the publication of the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, the Bush Administration has frequently charged that for the United Nations to any longer be considered relevant it must authorize the use of force against Iraq. But the counter assertion might well be made that a United Nations which cannot take a definitive and effective stand against such an

unprovoked and deliberate destruction of Iraq, its people and their society, by the United States, would indeed be an irrelevant forum. For wasn't it created to provide a voice and an effective cooperative structure to support all its member nations and thereby avoid such destructive conflict?

Little by little, voices have begun to be raised around the world in opposition to the Bush Doctrine. But few as yet seem to realize the significance of its declaration of the "union of our values and our national interests." Values are reduced by this doctrine to power and prosperity for us and our friends. Those who do not choose to accept and support this agenda face the options of being unprotected, denied assistance, and "compelled to accept their sovereign responsibilities." Such values as liberty, equality, self-determination, independence, sovereignty acquire a singularly unequivocal and radical meaning under this doctrine: acquiescence in the supreme authority of the United States of America and its network of power elites.

On the Divine Mother: A Mystery and A Prophecy

Transition and Transformation

Our mental species has stepped into a clearing, to use the metaphor of phenomenology, parallel perhaps to the one into which our primate ancestors stepped more than a million years ago. And perhaps a similar social and ecological crisis prevailed then, accompanied by an overwhelming inner urge among the *avant garde* to survive and transcend. We might also conjecture, however, that the conditions under which we have been forced into the clearing today are unique, precipitated perhaps by the brilliant deconstructions of post-modern philosophy and by the perilous moments of economic and political crisis that contemporary humanity has created, as it vacillates between the suprarational and irrational, under the stress of an intricately interdependent world-wide physical, social, and ecological fabric stretched to the tearing point.

We might also point to the extraordinary probability that our industrial, technological age and global civilization have reached their terminus, following two-hundred and fifty years of Rationalism, two major world-wars, numerous lesser wars, nationalism, internationalism, economic globalization, and a population explosion that has overburdened the planet's natural resource base. It seems most likely that it is all of these developments along the arc of human progress combined, with their underpinnings of human ignorance, greed, and lust for power, which have placed us emphatically before the definitive choice that we must now boldly confront, between two imminent possibilities: a profounder, truer, more luminous future, or self-destruction and chaos.

As the Mother put it in a message in 1967 or 1968, – when we were in the midst of one of the more significant lesser wars of the Twentieth Century, and she was on the threshold of the mystery and prophecy that

were the issue of her life, – with her characteristic irony and simplicity, “Men, countries, continents, the choice is imperative – Truth or the Abyss?”

And then, in the course of the following year, she experienced the momentous change, which a lifetime of spiritual work had prepared her for and moved her steadily toward. Of it she said:

It was the complete Presence, absolute freedom, and a certitude: these cells, other cells (gesture here and there showing other bodies), it didn't matter, it was life everywhere, consciousness everywhere.

Absolutely wonderful.

It came effortlessly, and it left simply because... I was too busy. It doesn't come at will – what comes at will is what we might call a “copy”: it looks like it, but it's not THE Thing. The thing... There is something wholly independent of our aspiration, our will, our effort... wholly independent. And this something appears to be absolutely all-powerful, in the sense that none of the body's difficulties exist. At such times, everything disappears. Aspiration, concentration, effort... no use at all. And it's the DIVINE SENSE, you understand, that's what having the divine sense means. During these few hours, I understood in an absolute way what having the divine consciousness in the body means. And then, this body, that body, that other body... it doesn't matter: it moved about from one body to another, quite free and independent, aware of the limitations or the possibilities of each body – absolutely wonderful. I had never, ever had this experience before. Absolutely wonderful. It left because I was so busy that... and it didn't leave because it had just come to show “how it is” – that's not it: it's because life and the organization of life engulf you.

I know it's there (gesture in the background). I know it is, but... But that's a transformation as I understand it! And clearly, in people it could express itself – not something vague – clearly – in this man, in that woman, in...(gesture here and there), quite clearly. And with a smile. ... It is ...yes, I think the only word that can describe the sensation it gives is “an Absolute” – an Absolute. That's the sensation: of being in the presence of the Absolute. The Absolute: absolute Knowledge, absolute Will, absolute Power... Nothing, nothing can resist. And then this Absolute is so merciful! But if we compare it with all that we regard as

goodness, mercy... ugh! That's nothing at all. It's THE Mercy with the absolute power and... it's not Wisdom, not Knowledge, it's... It has nothing to do with our process. And That is everywhere, it's everywhere. It's the body's experience. And to that it has given itself entirely, totally, without asking anything – anything. A single aspiration, "To be capable of being that, what that wills, of serving That" – not even "serving," of BEING That.

But that state, which lasted for several hours... never had this body, in the ninety-one years it's been on earth, felt such happiness: freedom, absolute power, and no limits (gesture here and there, and everywhere), no limits, no impossibilities, nothing. It was... all other bodies were itself. There was no difference, it was only a play of the consciousness... (gesture like a great Rhythm) moving about. ...

You know, there's a considerable increase in the people who want to see me, and in the influences when they see me, the effects when they see me (which don't at all correspond to a will or a consciousness or anything – that no longer exists: it works or it doesn't work), and seen like that, it's: either you hold out and can do the work, or else, too bad. That's how it is, you understand. ...

It's really like a GRACE, you know, as if: don't waste time – don't waste time, you must do the work, or else...

But this tremendous Power is especially this, a mercy, a clemency! ... NO, there are no words, we have no words to describe that, it's something... Just paying attention and... it's bliss. And I understood (it made me understand certain things), the stories of people who, in the midst of torture, felt bliss – that's how it is. A bliss. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 10, February 15, 1969)

We must take life as a Grace, otherwise it's impossible to live. ...

I am entirely convinced that things are as they must be, and that it's simply the body that lacks suppleness, tranquillity, trust... So I can't even say that things grate, but... You understand, the work consists in changing the conscious base of all the cells – but not all at once! Because that would be impossible; even little by little is very difficult: the moment when the conscious base is changed is... there is almost a sort of panic in the cells, and the impression, "Ooh! What's going to happen?" ...There is a moment when there's almost an anguish, you

know, you're suspended like that; it may be a few seconds, but those seconds are terrible. ...

But more and more – more and more – the body has been learning that what happens (what happens every second) is the best thing that can happen given the general condition. It's entirely convinced of that. And it's content to do like this (gesture of self-abandon) and say, "Let Your Will be done." That's all. If it can do that in a very continuous and peaceful way, then things are fine. It's only when it tries to find out why and how and... then things go wrong. It has to be like this (same gesture of self-abandon): "Let Your Will be done." Then it's all right. It doesn't ask to know, only there's the old habit.

At the critical moment (there are critical moments), at the critical moment, this surrender (it's even more than surrender, it's a complete abdication of everything, of its existence, and everything) is filled with light and force. That's the Response. (February 19, 1969)

There is clearly a work of change of consciousness (Mother touches her body), and it's going very, very fast, so I don't remember the transition, the passages...

It's the sense of the body's ego that has gone away, with a very strange result... While the experience is there, I might just manage to describe it, but... First the sense of limit, that is, of the body existing as a separate thing, has disappeared; for instance, the sensation that "you" knock against "something else" (I don't know how to explain) has completely gone. And it leaves...

There is something existing in a constant, permanent way; it's a sort of STATE of consciousness related to the material world... In the ordinary state, a sensation comes from a precise place in the body, it's noted, recorded somewhere in the brain – now it's no longer like that at all. The sensations... but they're not exactly sensations: it's a certain type of VIBRATION, and it comes from EVERYWHERE, like that (gesture all around); also like this (gesture from the body), but like that, like that...(gesture from every side), everywhere like that. So then the consciousness... I've tried to see where the consciousness is, and it's somewhere above; it's everywhere, diffused absolutely everywhere, but there's still a center of consciousness somewhere above (gesture above the head), as though it were more compact there; otherwise it's

everywhere, diffused everywhere, but it's slightly more compact here (same gesture above the head), compact and stable, like that (Mother closes her two fists in an unshakable gesture), and that's what conveys orders to the body (but all those words are idiotic; when I utter them they disgust me). You understand, that's where the relationship with the Supreme Consciousness is established permanently and constantly – I say "Supreme Consciousness," I've adopted these words so as not to make sentences all the time; I might say "the Divine," but the Divine is so totally present everywhere that... It's not the same thing (gesture above); I can't call it "will" because it has none of the characteristics of human will: it's not a will "exerting itself on" something, that's not it, it's... IN ITSELF; it's between vision, decision, will, power, all of it together. I don't know. And much more than that. But that's where the center is, as far as the body and all that's immediately around it is concerned. And that is... Strange, it's extraordinarily imperative and all-powerful, and at the same time it's the Peace ("peace" is a poor little word worth nothing much), it's perfect Peace and Immobility ("immobility" is idiotic – but how are we to speak?!). And that is there constantly (gesture above Mother).

That's what is taking the place of the conscious will as regards moving the body, for its internal functioning and for its action. And when the moment comes (it takes place gradually but there is a "moment") for the old functioning – the ordinary functioning – to be eliminated or to disappear and be replaced by That (gesture above), the result is... (wobbly gesture), I don't know if it's long or brief, but there's just a difficult transition. So then the body is caught between... (here or there, on one spot or another, for one thing or another) between the old habit and the new functioning. There's just a transition of anguish. In most of its parts, the body is conscious of the stupidity of that anguish, but... the function or the part or... is seized with panic. Then it takes a material stillness for order to be restored.

That's a wholly inadequate and stupid description, but I don't know what to do! There are no words. It's an approximation.

And all that takes place within a permanent Consciousness (Mother makes a round gesture), solid, you know, extraordinarily stable! It's everywhere like that. ...

And the two things: the true Perception, and a sort of diminished,

slowed down memory of the old way; and in that old way there are... all kinds of undesirable but general, universal things, which are hard to change for that reason, because the sort of "formation" now in the making is foreign, so to speak, to the world. (February 26, 1969)

And so it goes, from week to week, throughout the year 1969, and the five hundred pages of her Agenda for that year, with description after description of her experiences of the "new consciousness" and its process of cellular transformation. Until, on November 19, she reaches a definitive realization. And in this commentary, the many attempts she has made throughout the year to express the ever elusive contradiction between that "material stillness" and "Immobility," and its concurrent sense of Absolute Power and Irresistible Action, which was her constant, paradoxical experience, culminate in a final resolution. Almost a year after the beginning of the physical realization of the "new consciousness," she is able to declare the nature and characteristic form of the "supramental consciousness" manifest in the body.

There was a day when many problems came up, following something that took place... then this morning (at the end of the night) I had the experience which was the explanation. And for hours, I lived in an absolutely clear perception (not a thought, a clear perception) of... the why and the how of creation. It was so luminously clear! It was irrefutable. It lasted for at least four or five hours, then it settled; little by little the intensity and clarity of the experience diminished...

But everything had become so limpid! All opposite theories, all that was down below (Mother looks down from above), and all explanations, all that Sri Aurobindo said, certain things too that Theon had said, all that, as a result of the experience, found its own place and was absolutely clear. At the time I could have told you, now it's going to be a bit hard.

You understand, many things Sri Aurobindo had said remained... in spite of all that one has read, all the theories and explanations, something remained (how can I put it?) hard to explain (it's not "explain," that's very small). For instance, suffering and the will to cause suffering, all that side of the Manifestation. There was indeed a sort of foreknowledge of the original identity of hate and love, because they

went to the two extremes, but for all the rest, it was difficult. Today it was so luminously simple, that's it, so obvious!

I don't know if you can make out these words. They represented something very precise for me; now it's nothing but words.

Stability and change

Inertia and transformation

Eternity and progress

Unity =

It was the vision of the creation: the vision, the understanding, the why, the how, the whither, everything was there, everything together, and clear; clear, clear... I tell you, I was in a golden glory, luminous, dazzling.

I might put it this way (for the convenience of expression, I'll say "the Supreme" and "the creation"): In the Supreme it's a unity that contains all possibilities perfectly united, without differentiation. The creation is, so to speak, the projection of all that makes up that unity, by dividing all opposites, that is to say, by separating (that's what was caught by those who said that creation is separation), by separating: for instance, day and night, white and black, evil and good, and so on (all that is our explanation). All together, all of it together is a perfect unity, immutable and... indissoluble. The creation is the separation of all that "makes up" this unity – we might call it the division of the consciousness – the division of the consciousness, which starts from unity conscious of its unity to arrive at unity conscious of its multiplicity IN UNITY.

So then, this route is what, for us – for the fragments – is expressed as space and time.

And for us as we are, each point of this Consciousness has the possibility of being conscious of itself AND conscious of the original Unity. And that's the work now being accomplished, that is to say, each infinitesimal element of this Consciousness, while retaining this state of consciousness, is now recapturing the total original state of consciousness – the result is the original Consciousness conscious of its Unity AND conscious of the whole play: all the innumerable elements of this Unity. So for us, it gets expressed as the sense of time: going from the Inconscient to this state of consciousness. And the Inconscient is

the projection of the primeval Unity (if we may say so – all those words are completely stupid), of the essential unity unconscious of its own Unity – that’s the Inconscient. And this Inconscient is growing increasingly conscious in beings who are conscious of their infinitesimal existence and AT THE SAME TIME – through what we call progress or evolution or transformation – who manage to be conscious of the original Unity.

And that, as it was seen, explained everything.

Words are nothing.

Everything, everything, from the most material thing to the most ethereal, EVERYTHING was included in it, clear, clear, clear – a vision.

And evil, what we call “evil,” has its INDISPENSABLE place in the whole. But it would no longer be felt as evil the minute one became conscious of that – necessarily. Evil is that infinitesimal element looking on its infinitesimal consciousness; but because consciousness is essentially ONE, it recaptures, regains the Consciousness of Unity – both together. And that’s what, THAT IS WHAT has to be realized. It’s a marvelous thing. I had the vision: at the time, there was the vision of THAT... And the beginnings (is it “beginnings”?), what they call in English the outskirts, what’s the farthest from the central realization, becomes the multiplicity of things, also the multiplicity of sensations, feelings, everything – the multiplicity of consciousness. And that action of separation is what created, what constantly creates the world, and what at the same time creates everything: suffering, happiness, all, all, all that was created, through its – what we might call “diffusion” – but it’s absurd, it’s not a diffusion: we live in the sense of space, so we say “diffusion” and “concentration,” but it’s nothing like that. ...

The first thing written was this:

Stability and change

It was the idea of the original Stability (if we may say so) which, in Manifestation, is expressed as inertia. And the unfolding is expressed as change. All right. Then came:

Inertia and transformation

Eternity and progress

Those were the opposites (those three things).

Then there was a pause (Mother draws a line below the triple opposition), then a Pressure again, and I wrote:

Unity = Power and repose combined

Yes, that's it.

Stability and change

Inertia and transformation

Eternity and progress

Unity = power and repose combined.

It's the idea that these two, combined, restored that state of consciousness which was trying to express itself.

It was on the scale of the universe – not on the scale of the individual.

I draw a line between the two to express that they didn't come together.

I remember; I had written the two ("power" and "repose") and this (the equals sign) to express that they were together, then the word "combined" came.

"You said, a vibration so rapid that it's imperceptible, that it's as if coagulated and still." (Satprem, referring to a previous conversation)

Yes. But it was really a Glory in which I lived for hours this morning.

And then everything, all, all our notions, all of them, even the most intellectual, it had become like this... like childish pursuits. And it was so obvious that the impression was, "there's no need to say that!"

All human reactions, even the highest, the purest, the noblest, it all seemed SO childish!...

But I could note, ... I could note that all the work could be done without the consciousness being altered. That's not what altered my consciousness: what veiled my consciousness was seeing people; that was when I began being here and doing what I do every day: projecting the divine Consciousness on people.

But it has come back... (what could I call it?) on the fringe, I mean that instead of BEING in it, when you asked me I began perceiving it. But the sensation is no longer there – there was nothing left BUT THAT, you understand! There was nothing left but that, and everything, everything

had changed – in appearance, in meaning, in...

That must be the supramental consciousness, I think that's what the supramental consciousness is. ...

There are no OPPOSITES. No opposites – not even contradictions. I say, NO OPPOSITES. It's that Unity, it's LIVING in that Unity. And it's not expressed in thoughts and words. I tell you, it was... a limitless immensity and a light... a motionless light, and at the same time a well-being... without even the appreciation of a well-being.

Now I am convinced that's what the supramental consciousness is.

And necessarily, necessarily, it must little by little change appearances. ...

Life as it is can be lived in that consciousness – but then one lives it well! ... One doesn't need to change anything: what needs to be changed changes by itself quite naturally.

I'll give you an example. For a few days I had difficulties with Z. and there was a sort of need to exert pressure on him so he would rectify a few of his movements. Today he made at least four or five mistakes (they weren't perceptible, in the sense that I didn't have a sensation of them: it was taking place there, like that, some distance away), but he was conscious of them in a COMPLETELY different way from usually, and he admitted it (which he never did before), and in the end he said he was changing (which is true). And all of it not only without one word, but without one movement of consciousness: simply the Pressure. So there. That's a proof... Everything would be done automatically, like an imposition of the Truth, without any need to intervene: simply remaining in the true consciousness, that's all, it's enough. There. ...

...You are conscious in a golden immensity (it's wonderful, mon petit!), luminous, golden, peaceful, eternal, all-powerful.

How did it come? ...There are really no words to express it, that sense of wonder towards the Grace... the Grace, the Grace is a thing that exceeds all understanding in its clear-sighted goodness...

Naturally, the body had the experience. Something took place which I won't tell, and it had the true reaction; it didn't have the old reaction, it had the true one: it smiled, you know, with this Smile of the supreme Lord – it smiled. That remained there for a day and a half. And

that difficulty was what let the body make the last progress, let it live in that Consciousness; if everything had been harmonious, things might have dragged on for years – it's wonderful, you know, wonderful!

How stupid people are! When the Grace comes to them, they drive it away, saying, "Oh, how horrible!..." I'd known that for a long time, but my experience is... a bedazzlement.

"Yes, each thing is perfectly and marvelously what it must be every instant." (Satprem)

Exactly.

"But it's our vision that isn't in tune." (Satprem)

Yes, it's our separate consciousness.

The whole is brought with lightning speed towards the consciousness that will be this Consciousness of the point and of the whole at the same time. (November 19, 1969)

In these few pages, from more than 6000 pages of recorded conversations that she had with Satprem, from 1958 until her physical passing in November 1973, we get a glimpse of what Sri Aurobindo often referred to in his many volumes of spiritual philosophy and integral Yoga as "the supramental transformation." And we get a glimpse of "the Mother," Mirra Alfassa, narrating her experience of transformation, of whom Sri Aurobindo said, "There is one divine Force which acts in the universe and in the individual and is also beyond the individual and the universe. The Mother stands for all these, but she is working here in the body to bring down something not yet expressed in this material world so as to transform life here – it is so that you should regard her as the Divine Shakti working here for that purpose." (*The Mother*, p.50, SABCL, Vol. 25)

And it was this process, so thoroughly elaborated and grounded in his many volumes of philosophy and Yoga, this process of the Divine Shakti working through him to achieve the supramental transformation which he also had undertaken, which became the theme of his epic *mantra* of transformation, *Savitri* (1950). And it is there, as in the *Mother's Agenda*, that we can come into contact with and grasp something of this

extraordinary spiritual phenomenon, which is the reason why we recommend in our *Savitri Immersion Workshops* the reading of these two works together, as companion teachings. As the Mother remarked, in the context of this same volume of conversations in 1969,

Yesterday, I read another part of *Savitri* which tells how the king is transformed – those are ALL the experiences my body is now going through! I knew nothing about it (I don't remember that at all), and I seemed to be reading all the experiences my body is now going through... It's interesting.

There's EVERYTHING in this *Savitri*. (July 26, 1969)

The Canto of *Savitri* that she was referring to is largely autobiographical, and is the fifth Canto of Book One, titled The Yoga of the King, from which she quotes these lines:

He saw the unshaped thoughts in soulless forms,
Knew Matter pregnant with spiritual sense,
Mind dare the study of the Unknowable,
Life its gestation of the Golden Child. ...
A Will, a hope immense now seized his heart,
And to discern the superhuman's form
He raised his eyes to unseen spiritual heights,
Aspiring to bring down a greater world. (*Savitri*, I.V.76)

In order to better illustrate the correspondences between the experiences narrated in these two, different forms of autobiography – personal conversation and epic poetry – by these two masters of the Supramental Yoga, it will be helpful to turn now to a longer passage a few pages on in the same Canto, and to quote it at length. For it highlights some of those same experiences just related by the Mother, about which we may recall that she said her words were painfully inadequate to express the experience. The unique aspect of *mantric* verse is precisely its ability to convey something of such experiences with an authenticity and completeness that cannot be achieved by any other form of speech. In these lines, the experience of ego-loss, and liberation from mind into another, more direct way of knowing, – by seeing the Absolute in all things – is vividly and dramatically portrayed.

In a moment, shorter than death, longer than time,
By a Power more ruthless than Love, happier than Heaven,
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force
Hurried into unimaginable depths,
Upborne into immeasurable heights,
It was torn out from its mortality
And underwent a new and boundless change. ...

All that represses our fallen consciousness
Was taken from him like a forgotten load:
A fire that seemed the body of a god
Consumed the limiting figures of the past
And made large room for a new self to live.
Eternity's contact broke the moulds of sense.
A greater force than the earthly held his limbs,
Huge workings bared his undiscovered sheaths,
Strange energies wrought and screened tremendous hands
Unwound the triple cord of mind and freed
The heavenly wideness of a Godhead's gaze.
As through a dress the wearer's shape is seen,
There reached through forms to the hidden absolute
A cosmic feeling and transcendent sight.
Increased and heightened were the instruments.
Illusion lost her aggrandizing lens;
As from her failing hand the measures fell,
Atomic looked the things that loomed so large.
The little ego's ring could join no more;
In the enormous spaces of the self
The body now seemed only a wandering shell,
His mind the many-frescoed outer court
Of an imperishable Inhabitant:
His spirit breathed a superhuman air. (*Savitri*, I.V.81-2)

If the reader is able to hear these texts – from the Mother's Agenda and

from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, preferably read aloud with power and conviction, parallel to each other in the same audible/sensible time frame, they have the power to mutually clarify and reinforce the experiences that are being narrated, in a way that does not require the enhancement of commentary or analysis but rather lets them stand on their own, in a self-explanatory clarity, directly perceived by the hearing/seeing intuitive consciousness. And it is perhaps only in this way that these extraordinary experiences can be meaningfully grasped and somewhat fully appreciated.

If we are able to employ this strategy successfully and are brought into the tangible presence of something of the Yoga of Transformation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, without the necessity of drawing and analyzing mental parallels and attempting to restate the substance of the experience in a more abstract way, we may then be able to ask ourselves, within this ambience of receptivity, – How is such an experience possible, given the nature of the mind and the world as we know them? And what is the deeper meaning of this practice and process for the future of humanity?

The answer to both questions is to be found in the principle of the Divine Shakti which is fundamental to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy. Supermind, in his philosophical/spiritual vision is the Consciousness-Force of the Absolute, and the creative power of existence in time and space, from which mind, life, and matter devolve. As such, it is the Divine Mother, of whose process he says in *Savitri*:

Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.
The great World-Mother by her sacrifice
Has made her soul the body of our state;
Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness
Divinity's lapse from its own splendours wove
The many-patterned ground of all we are.
An idol of self is our mortality. (*Savitri*, II.I.99)

It is in this next Canto, titled The World-Stair, which follows immediately after the one from which we have taken our earlier selections, that Sri

Aurobindo lays out most explicitly the theme of creation, the basis of evolution in the Inconscient, and the return through evolution to Divine Consciousness, which recurs throughout this poem of over 700 pages. Like *Mother's Agenda*, we shall here sample only a few brief pages of *Savitri*. But it is here, in this poetic masterpiece, that Sri Aurobindo makes living and tangible the concepts of the two who are one, Self and Nature, Purusa and Prakriti, Ishwara and Shakti, Brahman and Maya, Being and Becoming, so thoroughly explored with incomparable philosophical power in *The Life Divine* (1940), but expressed here in the more powerfully vibrant visionary rhythms and images of *mantric* revelation. And it is through these lines of poetry that we may perhaps be brought most closely into resonance with the unity of stillness and power that the Mother identified as the defining characteristic of the supramental consciousness. This is Sri Aurobindo's vision:

All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye,
All could be known the mind has never grasped;
All could be done no mortal will can dare.
A limitless movement filled a limitless peace.
In a profound existence beyond earth's
Parent or kin to our ideas and dreams
Where Space is a vast experiment of the soul,
In an immaterial substance linked to ours
In a deep oneness of all things that are,
The universe of the Unknown arose.
A self-creation without end or pause
Revealed the grandeurs of the Infinite:
It flung into the hazards of its play
A million moods, a myriad energies,
The world-shapes that are fancies of its Truth
And the formulas of the freedom of its Force.
It poured into the Ever-stable's flux
A bacchic rapture and revel of Ideas,
A passion and motion of everlastingness.
There rose unborn into the Unchanging's surge

Thoughts that abide in their deathless consequence,
Words that immortal last though fallen mute,
Acts that brought out from Silence its dumb sense,
Lines that convey the inexpressible.
The Eternal's stillness saw in unmoved joy
His universal Power at work display
In plots of pain and dramas of delight
The wonder and beauty of her will to be.
All, even pain, was the soul's pleasure here;
Here all experience was a single plan,
The thousandfold expression of the One.
All came at once into his single view;
Nothing escaped his vast intuitive sight,
Nothing drew near he could not feel as kin:
He was one spirit with that Immensity.
Images in a supernal consciousness
Embodying the Unborn who never dies,
The structured visions of the cosmic Self
Alive with the touch of being's eternity
Looked at him like form-bound spiritual thoughts
Figuring the movements of the Ineffable.
Aspects of being donned world-outline; forms
That open moving doors on things divine,
Became familiar to his hourly sight;
The symbols of the Spirit's reality,
The living bodies of the Bodiless
Grew near to him, his daily associates.
The exhaustless seeings of the unsleeping Mind,
Letterings of its contact with the invisible,
Surrounded him with countless pointing signs;
The voices of a thousand realms of Life
Missioned to him her mighty messages. ...

Tireless the heart's adventure of delight,
Endless the kingdoms of the Spirit's bliss,

Unnumbered tones struck from one harmony's strings;
Each to its wide-winged universal poise,
Its fathomless feeling of the All in one,
Brought notes of some perfection yet unseen,
Its single retreat into Truth's secrecies,
Its happy sidelight on the Infinite.
All was found there the Unique had dreamed and made
Tinging with ceaseless rapture and surprise
And an opulent beauty of passionate difference
The recurring beat that moments God in Time. (*Savitri*, II.I.95-7)

And to discover the impact of the realization of this all-creative Consciousness-Force of the Absolute on the person of the Yogi in Sri Aurobindo's words, and the new possibilities that it makes available, we need only look back briefly to the previous Canto and the Yoga of the King:

All she new fashions by the thought and word,
Compels all substance by her wand of Mind.
Mind is a mediator divinity:
Its powers can undo all Nature's work:
Mind can suspend or change earth's concrete law.
Affranchised from earth-habit's drowsy seal
The leaden grip of Matter it can break;
Indifferent to the angry stare of Death,
It can immortalise a moment's work:
A simple fiat of its thinking force,
The casual pressure of its slight assent
Can liberate the Energy dumb and pent
Within its chambers of mysterious trance:
It makes the body's sleep a puissant arm,
Holds still the breath, the beatings of the heart,
While the unseen is found, the impossible done,
Communicates without means the unspoken thought;
It moves events by its bare silent will,
Acts at a distance without hands or feet.

This giant Ignorance, this dwarfish Life
It can illumine with a prophet sight,
Invoke the bacchic rapture, the fury's goad,
In our body arouse the demon or the god,
Call in the Omniscient and Omnipotent,
Awake a forgotten Almightyness within.
In its own plane a shining emperor,
Even in this rigid realm, Mind can be king:
The logic of its demigod Idea
In the leap of a transitional moment brings
Surprises of creation never achieved
Even by Matter's strange unconscious skill.
All's miracle here and can by miracle change. (*Savitri*, II.1.84-5)

It is the authenticity of these lines that brings them home to the listening soul, more powerfully and essentially than any particular aspect of the art of poetry. From "A self-creation without end or pause," to "The recurring beat that moments God in Time," there unfolds a continuous vision of the One in All, through eighty lines of poetic image, each line of which amplifies the same constant perception, conveying something of "the inexpressible." And it is clearly his perception, his vision of the world, energized by a consciousness that is one with the world, in an interior poise of unchanging unity and stability, and a simultaneous intimate engagement with its manifold extension in form and force. This poetry is not merely the product of a creative intelligence with a mastery of language, or of a spiritual teacher imparting words of wisdom. It is the voice of the divine Inhabitant chanting out the rhythms and images of his myriad embodiments. It is the Self, expressing itself, through its luminous creative power of speech (*Savitri*, the goddess of illumined speech), with the same energy, and infinite variety, that it employs in the manifestation of its spatial, temporal world of material life and mind. Therefore we are able to receive something of its simultaneous stillness and power of creation through the power of its poetic word.

Similarly, the authenticity of the Mother's descriptions of her Yogic realizations comes home to us with a directness that is only possible

because they are lived experiences, narrated day by day, year after year, as they unfold, and we can hear them, breathe them, and assimilate them with something of the immediacy and simplicity of the moments that are being lived even as they are being expressed. There is no pretense in this communication, even though it conveys some of the most extraordinary and momentous discoveries possible to humanity at this time. And even though *Savitri* is the product of one of the most extraordinary spiritual masters and poetic geniuses of the age, the experiences are similarly being lived by him day by day, over a period of some thirty years during which the poem is being written, and therefore bear an authenticity of discovery no less immediate, and certainly no less momentous, for having been formed by the highest art, with the deliberate purpose of imparting guidance and enlightenment to this and future generations.

And yet, it is only when the receptive soul becomes a vehicle for the light and power of the message, and is able to identify with the divine Inhabitant, even for a moment, that we know with certainty the seed of future realizations has been sown. Then we are able to feel the Stillness and the Presence of the Divine Shakti working in us, surrounding us and penetrating us with its solid spiritual Force, beginning in us the process, and the miracle, of divine change. And we begin to understand the mysteries and prophetic possibilities that she revealed with statements of such simplicity and candor, as in:

...this Consciousness which has manifested since the beginning of the year, it's VERY active; it has spread about and is very active. ...The body consciousness has become individualized and at the same time independent, which means it can enter other bodies and feel quite at ease there. ...That completely changes the body's attitude with regard to solutions: there's no more attachment or sense of extinction, you understand, since the consciousness... it's the body consciousness that has become independent. And that's very interesting. In other words, in any physical substance sufficiently developed to receive it, it can manifest. (March 12, 1969)

Contexts and Contrasts

We should perhaps begin to put this experience of transformation in perspective by considering the highly significant contrast drawn by the Mother between Consciousness and consciousness. This distinction appears to be similar to that found in Sri Aurobindo between Mind and mind. And this is a distinction that also occurs frequently in the context of Buddhist philosophy, where Mind is the fundamental principle of existence, and is thought of as a pure, self-existent emptiness. In traditional Vedanta, it is the Absolute, or Brahman, which is thought of similarly as the One Self, a self-existent reality that negates the nominal mental realities of *nama* (name) and *rupa* (form). The world of sensation, impression, and conceptual judgment that constitute the nature of most normal human experience, and in Western philosophy provide the ground of subjective knowledge, is the world of “small mind,” a mental world that in Buddhist philosophy is thought of as being essentially a world of illusion, and the source of attachment and suffering, as opposed to “big Mind,” which is bliss. Western philosophy has generally held that the “objective” world is just as real as the subjective world, and that in fact the latter is a reflection of the former. For this tradition also, especially in the Platonic version, the subjective impressions and judgments of the world are often illusory and false, but truth – or a true knowledge of the world – is nevertheless possible for mind that reaches the plane of the Ideal. The conventional interpretation of this philosophy holds that even for ideal mind, knowledge is still only representational. From the modernist perspective, however, the subjective nature of human knowledge, especially in the light of scientific knowledge that contradicts what we often believe about the world that we perceive, has led to the widespread acceptance of the modern view that human knowledge is incapable of knowing the world absolutely as it really is, with a consequent skepticism toward human knowledge in general.

For the illusionist philosophies of Buddhism and Vedanta, both objective and subjective knowledge of the world of everyday sense experience may have some relative truth, but both are ultimately false, in the sense that only the Absolute is Real. The makeshift reality that we contend with on a daily basis can never be really real, and knowledge based on it

can never be truly true. Big Mind, in this view, transcends all relative, phenomenal existence.

Such illusionist philosophies, which characterize much of what we think of as Eastern religious thought, are based on an experience of the Absolute, an experience of absolute emptiness and bliss, as the ultimate achievement of consciousness, and one that liberates a person so enlightened from illusion and suffering. It appears that this is what the Mother has referred to above as Consciousness with a capital C., and what Buddhism refers to as Mind with a capital M. The knowledge that characterizes this knowing is knowledge of absolute Reality; its experience is of oneness with an infinite, divine, all-encompassing Being.

But it also appears that the Mother's experience of this Consciousness, from the point of view of the "new consciousness" that she has realized, includes the world of relative and finite form and change, which no longer appears to be characterized by the opposites of suffering and joy, good and evil, for there are no longer any opposites. Illusion, from this point of view, seems to be the result, or characteristic nature, of the way of experiencing and perceiving the world that is common to the mind of humanity, but not to the "new consciousness," which is no longer subject to this illusory way of knowing and being. It is one with the world of name and form, energy and experience, in which it continues to be a related, active participant, but with a new ability to interact without a sense of separateness, and to act as an effective channel of the one Consciousness that seems to be continuous with all the forms of existence. The result is that everything internal and external is elevated to the status of the Real.

There are lines from Book I, Canto V in *Savitri*, as we have seen, that convey this notion exactly: "Illusion lost her aggrandising lens/ As from her failing hand the measures fell; /The little ego's ring could join no more;/...The soul and cosmos faced as equal powers./ A boundless being in a measureless Time/ Invaded Nature with the infinite;..."

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo restates the philosophy of the Upanishads, the basis of that Hindu corpus of wisdom-teachings known

as Vedanta. And it is this philosophy which provides the framework for an understanding of how the experience of such a cosmic consciousness and identity with the All is possible. For example, he writes: "An absolute, eternal and infinite Self-existence, Self-awareness, Self-delight of being that secretly supports and pervades the universe even while it is beyond it, is then the first truth of spiritual experience." (LD, 1997, p.235) And it is notable that even here, in the midst of an elaborate philosophical treatise, he declares its foundation to be experience. But let us take this opportunity to hear him out, at least briefly, concerning the Absolute and its extension in time and space, which seems very close to the experience that the Mother was talking about, and in this short but vivid passage it seems also that Sri Aurobindo's interpretive language breaks into a form of poetic expression similar to that of the ancient Upanishad, where philosophy becomes revealed understanding.

Brahman is the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists; Brahman is the Force that sustains the power of God and Titan and Demon, the Force that acts in man and animal and the forms and energies of Nature; Brahman is the Ananda, the secret Bliss of existence which is the ether of our being and without which none could breathe or live. Brahman is the inner Soul in all; it has taken a form in correspondence with each created form it inhabits. The Lord of Beings is that which is conscious in the conscious being, but he is also the Conscious in inconscient things, the One who is master and in control of the many that are passive in the hands of Force-Nature. He is the Timeless and Time; he is Space and all that is in Space; he is Causality and the cause and the effect: He is the thinker and his thought, the warrior and his courage, the gambler and the dice-throw. All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman; Brahman is the Absolute, the transcendent, the incommunicable, the Supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that upholds all beings, but It is too the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity is an eternal portion of the Ishwara; it is the supreme Nature or Consciousness-Force that has become the living being in a world of living beings. The Brahman alone is, and because of It all are, for all are the Brahman; this Reality is the reality of everything that we see in Self and Nature. Brahman, the Ishwara, is all this by his Yoga-Maya, by the

power of his consciousness-force put out in self-manifestation: he is the Conscious Being, Soul, Spirit, Purusha, and it is by his Nature, the force of his conscious self-existence that he is all things; he is the Ishwara, the omniscient and omnipotent All-ruler, and it is by his Shakti, his conscious Power, that he manifests himself in Time and governs the universe." (LD, 324-325)

Of course, the Mother had read this and other passages like it many times before, along with all his other writings, and in particular *Savitri*, on which she had commented at length in earlier years. But in her conversations of 1969 she was engaged in a process of physical transformation, of the realization of the divine consciousness-force in her body, and she remarked more than once how her "mind" had been "taken away" in order for that process to proceed more rapidly. Although she still spoke logically about her experiences and tried to make sense of them, she did not make any attempt to explain things intellectually or to situate her thoughts in a theoretical framework. In fact, she preferred not to express her experiences in words at all, but was intent on living them out to their ultimate conclusion, and channeling their force into the world around her. And therefore, she was able to confide to Satprem that an experience such as the one she was having could never have been understood, even by her, merely on the basis of what Sri Aurobindo had written, even though it seems certain that he too must have been describing first-hand experiences in his poetry and philosophy.

Like earlier Vedantic schools of philosophy, Sri Aurobindo carried forward the tradition of the inspired word as the vehicle for spiritual knowledge, and of the practice of Yoga as the means for the experiential realization of that knowledge. But while traditional Vedanta was, for many centuries in India, a dualistic philosophy which held that Brahman, the Absolute, was the sole reality, and all else Maya, a dream or illusion of mind to be rejected in favor of liberation, Sri Aurobindo's vision and philosophy hold that Maya is the divine creative force of Brahman, and the world it creates at least a portion of the Real. The spiritual truth of existence, according to this philosophy, is an integral non-dualism in which the Absolute, Infinite, and Eternal is realized through his Yoga-

Maya force of creation in time and space. It is because of this fundamental divine nature of existence that consciousness is able to emerge through the evolution of life in matter. And because Consciousness is the fundamental principle of existence, mind is present as potential from the beginning of the material universe, which is in the process of a further evolution beyond mind into a divine supermind, and into a form of body and life that can fully express the harmony and beauty and power of that original, though still largely concealed, immanent nature.

This new consciousness that is evolving through a process of physical transformation, was called by Sri Aurobindo a "supramental" consciousness, and the transformed human vehicle of that emerging consciousness was sometimes referred to by him as a "superman." The Mother, in her conversations, therefore also sometimes used the term "superman" or "overman" consciousness in referring to the phenomenon that she was experiencing. And the use of that terminology by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has, I believe, more than a coincidental historical precedent in the philosophy of Nietzsche, as we shall see. But first, it is worthwhile at this point to present the view, often expressed by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*, of mind as a transitional vehicle of consciousness whose process and products are generally characterized by ignorance and illusion, but whose potential lies beyond in a yet unrealized life divine.

A world-conjecture's scheme is laboured out
On the dim floor of mind's incertitude,
Or painfully built a fragmentary whole.
Impenetrable, a mystery recondite
Is the vast plan of which we are a part;
Its harmonies are discords to our view
Because we know not the great theme they serve.
Inscrutable work the cosmic agencies.
Only the fringe of a wide surge we see;
Our instruments have not that greater light,
Our will tunes not with the eternal Will,

Our heart's sight is too blind and passionate.
Impotent to share in Nature's mystic tact,
Inapt to feel the pulse and core of things,
Our reason cannot sound life's mighty sea
And only counts its waves and scans its foam;
It knows not whence these motions touch and pass,
It sees not whither sweeps the hurrying flood:
Only it strives to canalise its powers
And hopes to turn its course to human ends:
But all its means come from the Inconscient's store. ... (*Savitri*,
II.V.160-1)

And if this were all and nothing more were meant,
If what now seems were the whole of what must be,
If this were not a stade through which we pass
On our road from Matter to eternal Self,
To the Light that made the worlds, the Cause of things,
Well might interpret our mind's limited view
Existence as an accident of time,
Illusion or phenomenon or freak,
The paradox of a creative thought
Which moves between unreal opposites,
Inanimate Force struggling to feel and know,
Matter that chanced to read itself by Mind,
Inconscience monstrously engendering soul. ... (*Savitri*, II.V.166)

Yet was this only a provisional scheme,
A false appearance sketched by limiting sense,
Mind's insufficient self-discovery,
An early attempt, a first experiment.
This was a toy to amuse infant earth;
But knowledge ends not in these surface powers
That live upon a ledge in the Ignorance
And dare not look into the dangerous depths
Or to stare upward measuring the Unknown.
There is a deeper seeing from within

And, when we have left these small purlieus of mind,
A greater vision meets us on the heights
In the luminous wideness of the spirit's gaze. ...
All is not here a blinded Nature's task:
A Word, a Wisdom watches us from on high,
A Witness sanctioning her will and works,
An Eye unseen in the unseeing vast;
There is an Influence from a Light above,
There are thoughts remote and sealed eternities;
A mystic motive drives the stars and suns.
In this passage from a deaf unknowing Force
To struggling consciousness and transient breath
A mighty Supernature waits on Time.
The world is other than we now think and see,
Our lives a deeper mystery than we have dreamed;
Our minds are starters in the race to God,
Our souls deputed selves of the Supreme. (*Savitri*, II.V.167-9)

Another important context in which the mystery and prophecy of the Divine Mother is to be understood, is that of the recent development in Western philosophy known as "postmodernism," which is perhaps best expressed in the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. This development is the culmination of a tradition of European philosophical thought that stretches over two millennia, from Plato to Hegel – a tradition that has seen its recapitulation and innovative renewal by great thinkers every few hundred years since its inception, in much the same way as the Hindu-Buddhist tradition developed during approximately the same time-frame in India. In the Twentieth Century it was Heidegger who accomplished the most comprehensive recapitulation and renewal, in such works as *Being and Time* (1927) and in his comprehensive interpretive study of *Nietzsche* (1946), both written at about the same time that Sri Aurobindo was writing *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. It is unquestionable that Sri Aurobindo's creative thought, like Heidegger's, was directly influenced by Nietzsche. And in several respects, Sri Aurobindo too may be considered a postmodern philosopher.

For example, Sri Aurobindo wrote, in an early essay on Heraclitus, "Nietzsche, the most vivid, concrete and suggestive of modern thinkers, as is Heraclitus among the early Greeks, founded his whole philosophical thought on this conception of existence as a vast Will-to-become and of the world as a play of force; divine Power was to him the creative Word, the beginning of all things and that to which life aspires. But he affirms Becoming only and excludes Being from his view of things; hence his philosophy is in the end unsatisfactory, insufficient, lopsided; it stimulates, but solves nothing. ... Nietzsche denied Being, but had to speak of a universal Will-to-be; which again, when you come to think of it, seems to be no more than a translation of the Upanishadic *tapo brahma, Will-Energy is Brahman*" (*The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 344,349). Like Heidegger, for Sri Aurobindo the importance of the concept of Being to an adequate philosophy of existence was paramount; and he admired Nietzsche's effort, which even in its apparent denial seems to have been an affirmation of Being as Will-to-Power.

With regard to the "new consciousness," the consciousness of the "overman," experienced by the Mother as related in her Agenda, and articulated in depth by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*, – descriptions of a world without opposites, in which Time and the Timeless, Stillness and Power, Being and Becoming are experienced in a relationship of Unity, – it is Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and Heidegger's *Being and Time* that provide the most relevant Western philosophical context for understanding this remarkable evolutionary phenomenon of consciousness.

Let us reconstruct this context, briefly, by first recalling the words of Nietzsche, as they were first spoken by Zarathustra, in the beginning of the book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1884):

I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the

overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.

Whoever is the wisest among you is also a mere conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I bid you become ghosts or plants?

Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go. ...

Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea; in him your great contempt can go under.

What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue. ...

Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.

I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.

I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore.

I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman's. ...

I love him who does not hold back one drop of spirit for himself, but wants to be entirely the spirit of his virtue: thus he strides over the bridge as spirit. (Walter Kaufmann trans., 1966, p. 12-15)

How can we not view this call of anguish at the state of humanity, and this vision of overcoming, as an essential and defining context for so much that transpired in the Twentieth Century, not the least of which was Sri Aurobindo's vision of a transformation of consciousness as the next step in the evolution of the earth? But to make the comparison easier and more explicit, we may turn to Heidegger for an explication of Nietzsche's tragic vision, and in particular Nietzsche's attempt at a resolution of the problem of time, which shows his thought to be most directly and emphatically relevant to our study.

In his masterful essay, *Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Heidegger confronts the problem of Being in Nietzsche's brilliantly inspired, yet darkly enigmatic work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, its relationship to Time and Becoming, and Nietzsche's recourse to the idea, and philosophy, of *the eternal return of the same* to solve this monumental issue in Western metaphysics. Because we have Heidegger's profound interpretation to guide us, we are able to discover an explanation of Nietzsche's "lopsided" emphasis on Becoming that was identified by Sri Aurobindo as this philosophy's major weakness. Heidegger writes:

In converse with his soul Zarathustra thinks his "most abysmal thought" (The Convalescent, section one; cf. Part II, On the Vision and the Riddle, section 2). Zarathustra begins the episode On the Great Longing with the words: "O my soul, I taught you to say 'Today' like 'One day' and 'Formerly,' I taught you to dance your round-dance beyond every Here and There and Yonder." The three words "Today," "One day," and "Formerly" are capitalized and placed in quotation marks. They designate the fundamental features of time. The way Zarathustra expresses them points toward the matter Zarathustra himself must henceforth tell himself in the very ground of his essence. And what is that? That "One day" and "Formerly," future and past, are like "today." And also that today is like what is past and what is to come. All three phases of time merge in a single identity, as the same in one single present, a perpetual "now." Metaphysics calls the constant now "eternity." Nietzsche too thinks the three phases of time in terms of eternity as the constant now. Yet for him the constancy consists not in stasis but in a recurrence of the same. When Zarathustra teaches his

soul to say those words he is the teacher of eternal return of the same. Such return is the inexhaustible abundance of a life that is both joyous and agonizing. Such a life is the destination toward which "the great longing" leads the teacher of eternal return of the same. Thus in the same episode "the great longing" is also called "the longing of superabundance."

The "great longing" thrives for the most part on that from which it draws its only consolation, that is to say, its confidence in the future. ...

Yet what induces Zarathustra to such hope, and what entitles him to it?

What bridge must he take in order to go over to the overman? What bridge enables him to depart from humanity hitherto, so that he can be released from it? ...in the episode "On the Tarantulas," Nietzsche has Zarathustra say: "For that man be redeemed from revenge – that is for me the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long storms." ...

Yet what does Nietzsche understand here by "revenge"? In what, according to Nietzsche, does redemption from revenge consist?

We shall be content if we can shed some light on these two questions. Such light would perhaps enable us to descry the bridge that is to lead such thinking from prior humanity to the overman. ...

In the second part of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in the episode we have already mentioned, "On redemption," Nietzsche has Zarathustra say: "This, yes, this alone is revenge itself: the will's ill will toward time and its 'It was.' " ...

Nietzsche defines revenge as "the will's ill will toward time and its 'It was.'" The supplement to the definition does not mean to put into relief one isolated characteristic of time while stubbornly ignoring the other two; rather, it designates the fundamental trait of time in its proper and entire unfolding as time. With the conjunction and in the phrase "time and its 'It was,' " Nietzsche is not proceeding to append one special characteristic of time. Here the and means as much as "and that means." Revenge is the will's ill will toward time and that means toward passing away, transiency. Transiency is that against which the will can take no further steps, that against which its willing constantly collides. Time and its "It was" is the obstacle that the will cannot budge. Time, as passing away, is repulsive; the will suffers on account of it. Suffering in

this way, the will itself becomes chronically ill over such passing away; the illness then wills its own passing, and in so doing wills that everything in the world be worthy of passing away. Ill will toward time degrades all that passes away. The earthly – Earth and all that pertains to her – is that which properly ought not to be and which ultimately does not really possess true Being. Plato himself called it *me on*, *nonbeing*...

But in what does redemption from ill will toward transiency consist? Does it consist in a liberation from the will in general – perhaps in the sense suggested by Schopenhauer and in Buddhism? Inasmuch as the Being of beings is will, according to the doctrine of modern metaphysics, redemption from the will would amount to redemption from Being, hence to a collapse into vacuous nothingness. For Nietzsche redemption from revenge is redemption from the repulsive, from defiance and degradation in the will, but by no means the dissolution of all willing. Redemption releases the ill will from its “no” and frees it for a “yes.” What does the “yes” affirm? Precisely what the ill will of a vengeful spirit renounced: time, transiency.

The “yes” to time is the will that transiency perdure, that it not be disparaged as nothing worth. Yet how can passing away perdure? Only in this way: as passing away it must not only continuously go, but must also always come. Only in this way: passing away and transiency must recur in their coming as the same. According to the doctrine of metaphysics, the predicate “eternity” belongs to the Being of things.

Redemption from revenge is transition from ill will toward time to the will that represents being in the eternal recurrence of the same. Here the will becomes the advocate of the circle.

(We should note that Heidegger defined revenge as used by Nietzsche here as “revulsion and defiance,” “defiant persecution,” and “vengeful persecution” that “defies its object by degrading it.” Nietzsche himself elaborated the notion in these same sections of Zarathustra as “punishment”: “For ‘punishment’ is what revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself. ... Things are ordered morally according to justice and punishment. Alas, where is the redemption from the flux of things and from the punishment called existence? ... No deed can be annihilated: how could it be undone by

punishment? ...Has the will been unharnessed yet from his own folly? Has the will yet become its own redeemer and joy-bringer? Has he unlearned the spirit of revenge and all gnashing of teeth?")

To put it another way: Only when the Being of beings represents itself to man as eternal recurrence of the same can man cross over the bridge and, redeemed from the spirit of revenge, be the one in transition, the overman....

Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra? He is the teacher whose doctrine would liberate prior reflection from the spirit of revenge to the "yes" spoken to eternal recurrence of the same. (Nietzsche, Vol. II, 1979, p. 218-226)

Thus, as Heidegger helps us see, Nietzsche solves the problem of transient mortality by investing Becoming with Being, and he thereby elevates time to the status of Eternity: the eternal recurrence of the same. To achieve this he must "go under" and that is his tragedy. "Creation – that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change. Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. Thus are you advocates and justifiers of all impermanence. To be the child who is newly born, the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the pangs of the birth-giver." (Kaufmann trans., p.87)

Heidegger: "But what does Nietzsche understand by "tragedy"? Tragedy sings the tragic. ..." It is the stillest words that bring on the storm. Thoughts that approach on doves' feet govern the world (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, conclusion to part II)." ... "The world revolves, not about the discoverers of new forms of hullabaloo, but about the discoverers of new values. It revolves *inaudibly* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part II)." ...The supreme art is the tragic; hence the tragic is proper to the metaphysical essence of beings. ...Tragedy prevails where the terrifying is affirmed as the opposite that is intrinsically proper to the beautiful. Greatness and great heights subsist together with the depths and with what is terrifying... "What makes someone heroic?" asks Nietzsche...; and he replies, "Going out to meet one's supreme suffering and supreme hope

alike." (*Nietzsche*, p. 28-29)

"Tragic knowing realizes that "life itself," being as a whole, conditions "pain," "destruction," and all agony; and that none of these things constitutes an "objection to this life." ...The tragic in Nietzsche's sense counteracts "resignation," if we may say that the tragic still finds it necessary to be "counter" to anything. The tragic in Nietzsche's sense has nothing to do with sheer self-destructive pessimism, which casts a pall over things; it has just as little to do with blind optimism, which is lost in the vertigo of its vacuous desires. The tragic in Nietzsche's sense falls outside this opposition, inasmuch as in its willing and in its knowing it adopts a stance toward being as a whole, and inasmuch as the basic law of being as a whole consists in struggle. (*Nietzsche*, Vol. II, p. 61)

"Only when contempt stems from love of the task, being transformed in such a way that, undergirded by an affirmation of the necessity of outrage, suffering, destruction, it can pass by in silence; only when the silence of such loving passing-by prevails; only then does the vast stillness extend and the sphere expand about the one who in this way has become himself." (*Nietzsche*, Vol. II, p. 60)

Is this experience a premonition of the supramental consciousness?

In his substantial, four-volume treatise on the philosophy of Nietzsche, Heidegger never tires of reminding us that "In philosophy the Being of beings is to be thought." And he never tires of asking the question, here as elsewhere throughout his writings, "What is Being?" The history of Western metaphysics is the attempt to answer this question, to determine the Real and distinguish it from the illusory and transitory. This is a tradition of philosophical and religious thought that has consistently rejected the impermanent and transient, much like Eastern tradition has done. In the Twentieth Century, under the influence of pervasive human destruction in Europe, this thinking led to the rejection of rationalism which supplied grounds for belief in the possible, and replaced it with the nihilistic judgment of life as absurd. It is the predominant Platonic tradition of this questioning in which both Heidegger and Nietzsche place themselves squarely, as subversives,

indefatigably determined to overturn both the classical and the modern versions of the tradition. And it is in their determination to do this, and thereby to restore value and primacy to the material world, that we find them aligned with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This is not to say that the transitory aspect of existence is not to be despised, nor that it is not equally a spur to human progress and transcendence. For Sri Aurobindo, in *Savitri*, it is exactly that, and his point of view toward it is certainly no less contemptuous than Nietzsche's; it verges on what might be termed divine contempt:

He saw the doubtfulness of all things here,
The incertitude of man's proud, confident thought,
The transience of the achievements of his force.
A thinking being in an unthinking world,
An island in the sea of the Unknown,
He is a smallness trying to be great,
An animal with some instincts of a god,
His life a story too common to be told,
His deeds a number summing up to nought,
His consciousness a torch lit to be quenched,
His hope a star above a cradle and a grave. (*Savitri*, I.V.78)

And the leap the Yogi makes to exceed this pathos is more dramatic, one could say more violent, than even Nietzsche's boldly inspired crossing-over:

The Immortal's pride refused the doom to live
A miser of the scanty bargain made
Between our littleness and bounded hopes
And the compassionate Infinitudes.
His height repelled the lowness of earth's state:
A wideness discontented with its frame
Resiled from poor assent to nature's terms,
The harsh contract spurned and the diminished lease. ...(*Savitri*,
I.V.77)

And the hope expressed by Sri Aurobindo for mankind, for the

“overman” and for the future, is more radical, more extreme, perhaps, than even the most inspired and insightful philosopher can yet dare:

And yet a greater destiny may be his,
For the eternal Spirit is his truth.
He can re-create himself and all around
And fashion new the world in which he lives... (*Savitri*, I.V.78)

As Heidegger puts the situation with respect to Nietzsche’s effort: “Overturning Platonism means, first, shattering the preeminence of the supersensuous as the ideal. Beings, being what they are, may not be despised on the basis of what should and ought to be. But at the same time, in opposition to the philosophy of the ideal and to the installation of what ought to be and of the “should,” the inversion sanctions the investigation and determination of that which is – it summons the question “What is being itself?” If the “should” is the supersensuous, then being itself, that which is, conceived as liberated from the “should,” can only be the sensuous. ...The interpretation of truth or true being as the sensuous is of course, considered formally, an overturning of Platonism, inasmuch as Platonism asserts that genuine being is supersensuous. Yet such inversion, and along with it the interpretation of the true as what is given in the senses, must be understood in terms of the overcoming of nihilism. ...Art and truth, creating and knowing, meet one another in the single guiding perspective of the rescue and configuration of the sensuous.” (*Nietzsche*, Vol. I, p. 160-161)

The whole of Heidegger’s work on phenomenology, and what he terms “fundamental ontology” is devoted to a demonstration of the Being of beings, through the deconstruction of Western metaphysics, and the overcoming of both Nihilism and Idealism. The problem that this effort encounters, and the one with which Western metaphysics is perpetually occupied, is that our knowledge of the beings that we know through our senses and cognitive processes, is an abstract knowledge made up of generalities: types, qualities, species, laws, none of which, to our conventional, logical way of thinking, exists concretely in itself as “something,” but all of which are known only through innumerable particular examples that embody the values that our knowing

encounters. All human beings are unique, just as are all snowflakes, all fingerprints, all genomes, all societies and cultures and economies and ecologies and galaxies, though each member of these groupings shares the unifying, identifying categories of characteristics whereby they are known and named by us. But is that which appears to persist throughout each exemplar's existence, – their apparently eternal forms, so obviously maintained through processes of perpetual regeneration and degeneration, something Real, or is it only an abstract concept that we deduce? If we consider the existence of the exemplar itself, standing there before us, made up of ever-changing material stuff, isn't the totality of its Being-there, as opposed to its possibly not-being-there, significant as well? That is to say, isn't its determining force of being-what-it is, its immediate spatial-temporal Presence, something remarkable in itself? Isn't this Being of the thing that we perceive and conceptualize as existing in time and space also something Real, that we also happen to know because of its presence in and through both a sensual and abstract form? Is the Permanent the Real, or is the Passing-away?

Heidegger's point, (which we hesitatingly suggest in a simplified way here only, without presuming to restate his arguments which are unsurpassed in their completeness), is that we know Being through the presence of beings in Time. And even though we know it mentally as an abstraction, we also know it as a concrete actuality of Force with Quality and Presence that appears to us through beings here, in the same world that we also inhabit as beings, in time. Thus, we know the "essences" of things through their recurrence as the "same." What we know is not merely an idea that we obtain through experiencing an object that embodies an Ideal relatively and imperfectly. We know the Being of those objects because we are continuous with their material embodiments in form, which we know sensually and mentally, and which separately and together embody the Force by which their essence, or Being, is determined. Being, knowing, and the things being known become one through their unified, continuous presence in time. Thus the Being of beings, and their existence as specific temporal things,

are in some sense one and knowable as such.

In the interpretation of Vedanta that Sri Aurobindo presents in *The Life Divine*, the term for this embodying of being in things is *svabhava*, self-nature. He writes, "...every possibility implies a truth of being behind it, a reality in the Existent; for without that supporting truth there could not be any possibles. In manifestation a fundamental reality of the Existent would appear to our cognition as a fundamental spiritual aspect of the Divine Absolute (*for example, Beauty or Power as Form expressed through an infinite variety of colorful self-replicating creatures capable of flight through a complex environment of co-evolved plants, insects, and air – my note [RH]*); out of it would emerge all its possible manifestations, its innate dynamisms: these again must create or rather bring out of a non-manifest latency their own significant forms, expressive powers, native processes; their own being would develop their own becoming, *svarupa, svabhava*." (LD, 1997, p. 313)

Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo, utilizing similar processes of deconstruction, and basing their thought, similarly, on discoveries made in the earliest extant philosophical meditations of their respective traditions, both reject the definitive separation of the Ideal Forms from the manifestations of the temporal, material world, and the devaluation of the body and life that has resulted, traditionally, from such a mental separation. Truth, Beauty, and the Good are not merely shining Immortals, forever aloof on an immaterial plane inhabited by these gods and goddesses, through whose intimations we are enabled to judge the relative values of temporal things, imbued forever with mortality and transience, as the myths of both rationalist and religious, Western and Eastern, cultures have generally wanted us to believe. Nor are our mental constructions simply the result of innate physical and chemical processes. Being and knowing are a complex totality of self-replicating processes and patterns of existence, far more complex and self-assured than we imagine. And we might, perhaps, recognize that Infinite behind each finite – individual, species, society, culture, ecology – as the boundless potential as well as the actual force that sustains each. And shall we not then call this Being, in relation to the entity that it

presences, its Soul or Self?

The “new consciousness” realized by the Mother makes this abstract understanding of Being a concrete, sensuous, material reality. One wonders whether Nietzsche or Heidegger even glimpsed the possibility of this plenitude of experience. But it certainly seems that they would agree with the view, often expressed by Sri Aurobindo, that even if we have fallen here from forgotten spheres of the Ideal, of which we are reminded by the imperfection of things, it is those godheads of the Ideal which must be brought down here, if the truth of things is to be realized in form.

But to discover, and grasp, the Immortal in mortal things, the Spiritual in material things, and to make that discovery in a living way that changes the quality of life and invests everything with its highest value, requires “another way of thinking and being.” It requires a “transformation of consciousness.” And the way to that discovery and change is arduous. As the Mother commented, it is still “foreign to the world” of everyday human experience, knowledge, and habit. Even the reading of Heidegger and of Sri Aurobindo is still difficult for the ordinary mind, with its “vulgar concept of time,” and its passionate commitment to speed and noise (however modulated by style). The call to radically change our way of thinking, being and living, through Nietzsche’s “crossing over” and “going under,” or through the Yoga practices of “silence,” “surrender,” and “abdication to the Divine Shakti,” are as yet almost inconceivable to a humanity consumed by “transient things.” Still the Zarathustras of tragedy and transcendence are needed to help us interpret the words of the seers, to help us deconstruct our vulgar concept of time, to help us build bridges to the Unseen, and to help us restore to Time the mystery of the presence of Being.

On the postmodernist route of Nietzsche and Heidegger, the clearest vision and voice of the late Twentieth Century is the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. In a lecture delivered in 1968, contemporaneously with the Mother’s discovery of the Unity of Opposites, Derrida, speaking about *Being and Time* and the thought-process of creative

deconstruction, said: "Its execution directed at the question of the meaning of Being, the "destruction" of classical ontology first had to shake the "vulgar concept" of time. This is a condition for the analytic of Dasein, which *is there* through the opening to the question of the meaning of Being, through the precomprehension of Being; temporality constitutes the "Being of a Being-there (Dasein) which comprehends Being," and it is the "ontological meaning of care" as the structure of Dasein. This is why temporality alone can provide the horizon for the question of Being." (*Margins of Philosophy*, 1972, p. 31)

It should be possible for us by now to take these cues from the preeminent deconstructionist and begin the process of reevaluation for ourselves, so urgent for us today and for the future of humanity. It is our privilege, and our responsibility, as conscious beings, present in time, to ask the question of Being with care; to become conscious of the essential care that is the essence of all temporal Being, and thereby to comprehend the essence of Being, which is also our Being-there (Dasein). And in the consciousness of that Presence, we shall celebrate and honor all Being.

Derrida said, most precisely and essentially, in another lecture of about the same date: "Speaking of the first word of Being, Heidegger writes: *The relation to what is present that rules in the essence of presencing itself is a unique one, altogether incomparable to any other relation. It belongs to the uniqueness of Being itself. Therefore, in order to name the essential nature of Being, language would have to find a single word, the unique word. From this we can gather how daring every thoughtful word addressed to being is. Nevertheless such daring is not impossible, since Being speaks always and everywhere throughout language* (*The Anaximander Fragment*, 1946, p.52).

"Such is the question: the alliance of speech and Being in the unique word, in the finally proper name. And such is the question inscribed in the simulated affirmation of *differance*. It bears on each member of this sentence: *Being/speaks/always and everywhere/throughout/language*" (*Margins of Philosophy*, 1972, p. 27).

(*Differance*, the title of the lecture, is a word invented by Derrida to convey the idea that existences or beings differ from each other in whatever ways, and are deferred with respect to their occurrences, in whatever ways, as an essential fact or aspect of Being. But Being, like difference, and *differance*, doesn't actually exist apart from the existences themselves and their relationships to each other in time and space. "For us, *differance* remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical. And this is particularly the case when these names state the determination of *differance* as the difference between presence and the present, and above all, and is already the case, when they state the determination of *differance* as the difference of Being and beings.") If we grasp this concept of *differance*, with respect to presence and the present, then we grasp a concept of time that is something altogether other than the vulgar concept of time. We grasp the Being of beings in its force, by which a being recurs as "the same" itself, the self of its identity, and is known as such, throughout its necessary duration, in spite of all changes of linear time, space, and circumstance that it may endure. And in this way we also grasp the wholeness and completeness of Time.

It is precisely this reevaluation of time, – emphasized constantly by the postmodernists, – that the European visionary and historian of consciousness, Jean Gebser, found to be the unique sign of a turning in Twentieth Century thought and the beginning of a new evolution of consciousness. In his massive, and at times prophetic psychological analysis of culture he writes, in 1949, "By now it ought to be evident to what extent the incorporation of and pervasive encounter with the question of time has brought about a fundamental change in philosophy. All aspects of time previously hidden by the "concept" of time are now visible, and its multi-leveled nature has become clear. At the same time, the recognition of time as intensity and quality, as an independent value and an inherent element, has exploded the formal-logical system of previous philosophies. Philosophy is mutating from the spatially-bound representational and three-dimensional world into the

four-dimensional perceptual world of a perspectival space-time-freedom. This means that philosophy is superseding itself." (*The Ever-Present Origin*, Authorized Trans. 1985, p. 406) "What is needed is care; a great deal of patience; and the laying aside of many preconceived opinions, wishful dreams, and the blind sway of demands. There is a need for a certain detachment toward oneself and the world, a gradually maturing equilibrium of all the inherent components and consciousness structures predisposed in ourselves, in order that we may prepare the basis for the leap into the new mutation." ... "The additional capacity of "verition," which becomes a reality with the new mutation, is the guarantee that someone who endures the effects and transformations that are manifest in him by four-dimensional integration effects in turn a transformation of events. This is not in the sense that he or she can exercise, say, a new kind of magic power, a new mythical equiposing or polarizing, or a new kind of mental superiority over persons, events, or processes. It is rather that his or her being present is in itself sufficient to effect new exfoliations and new crystallizations which could be nowhere manifest without his or her presence." (*The Ever-Present Origin*, p. 300)

It is thus, by way of contemplative thought and language, that the enigma of Being, – shall we say the unity and difference of Consciousness and Force – and the meaning and re-evaluated value of this existence as That, are sought and restored with daring – however tentatively – by such postmodern Western thinkers as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Gebser. And throughout their search we hear Sri Aurobindo's footsteps echoing in the corridors of time, beckoning beyond mind.

All was found there the Unique had dreamed and made
Tinging with ceaseless rapture and surprise
And an opulent beauty of passionate difference
The recurring beat that moments God in Time.
Only was missing the sole timeless Word
That carries eternity in its lonely sound,
The Idea self-luminous key to all ideas,
The integer of the spirit's perfect sum

That equates the unequal All to the equal One,
The single sign interpreting every sign,
The absolute index to the Absolute. (*Savitri*, II.I.97)

Time, Tragedy and Transcendence

It is only through temporality that the question of Being can be asked. That is the thought of Heidegger and Derrida. The answer to the question, What is Being?, or one of many cogent answers offered by Heidegger in his study of Nietzsche, – the experiential answer: “Living, suffering, and circling are not three distinct matters. They belong together and form one: being as a whole, to which suffering, the abyss, belongs...” (*Nietzsche*, Vol. II, p. 50).

“ ‘Downgoing’ means...descent as acknowledgment of the abyss. ...the eternity of the Moment that embraces everything in itself at once: the down-going” (*Nietzsche*, II, p. 59).

Again, we hear the resonance of this thought with that of Sri Aurobindo, when he speaks of the Yoga of Transformation to be undertaken by the Mother:

One dealt with her who meets the burdened great.
Assigner of the ordeal and the path
Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul
Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit’s goads,
The dubious godhead with his torch of pain
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.
August and pitiless in his calm outlook,
Heightening the Eternal’s dreadful strategy,
He measured the difficulty with the might
And dug more deep the gulf that all must cross. (*Savitri*, I.II.17)

It is remarkable, I think, that now, at the end of the old and the beginning of a new millennium, Satprem, another French philosopher of postmodernism, and the Mother’s biographer and chronicler, who knows the Mother’s Agenda first hand, should write a book titled: *The*

Tragedy of the Earth – from Sophocles to Sri Aurobindo (1996, English trans., 1998). And in it we hear again the hymn of eternal return. But this time, it seems, we also hear a promise of change, not only of what is temporal, but of the tragedy at its roots – a promise of change in the nature of Being itself perhaps. For Heidegger, *Dasein*, Being, is the Being of human consciousness, the ability of mind to exceed itself and to realize, within and out beyond itself, Conscious Being. But its essence is still characterized by the tragic. The challenge put forth now, is a challenge put to Being itself and its tragic spirit. And do we not hear again in these pages the voice of Zarasthustra reborn? Satprem:

Even Machinery has taken the place of Fate, unless it is Fate masked. Perhaps it has taken the place of man the better to shatter the little barbarians we are, gorged with science and religion, as if these four and a half billion years of toil and kneading and convulsion had only served to produce a vain Primate, religious and scientific, or shameless, as we like – a nonman, or a Man yet to be, and yet to be the master of his Destiny.

Power is in us, but we do not yet know who we are and what is there, which is why we are the slaves of gigantic and cruel forces; our power is only for death and destruction and the thousand remedies and artifices of our powerlessness.

Power is in us, such is the constant chorus of that great tragic epic, *Savitri* – Sri Aurobindo's whole Work, whole life – power even over Death.

And because we have not solved that Riddle, which goes back a few billion years before the Sphinx, we have solved nothing of our life and our Earth – death is just, sorrow is just, our destructions are just, and, we might say, injustice is just, because they destroy what we are not, or not yet, and because they want to compel us, through fire and lightning and the whip, to find who we are, find our Power at the end of those thousands of years of preparatory Barbarism. ...

Nothing will ever be changed, neither the Earth nor the stars, until Death is changed – we cannot change life, our life, without changing Death. Such is Fate, our own and the Earth's destiny. Or else, we may change our little clothes for new ones equally fateful and cruel – until

we have found that for which we are here, on this Earth and not in Heaven, since the first little cell of a first little algae of Greenland three billion years ago. For Fate begins there. And at the heart of that first little cell, it holds its own answer.

But we have never gone that far, even with our microscopes, which only yield our own barbarian view of things. ...

After the inventions born of our powerlessness, we must invent our Power, or find it anew.

And Mother, that Actress in Sri Aurobindo's great tragedy, exclaimed: "Death must be vanquished, there must be no more death. That's very clear."

And she added: "What lends force to the opposition [the "opposition" is always Death] is superstitious ignorance – superstitious in the sense of a sort of faith or at least of belief in Destiny, in fate. It's ingrained, as if woven into the human substance... So there is the good destiny and the bad destiny; there is a divine force which one regards as something entirely beyond understanding, whose designs and aims are perfectly inexplicable, and the submission, the surrender consists in accepting – blindly – all that happens. One's nature revolts, but revolts against an Absolute against which it is helpless. And all of that is Ignorance. Not one of all those movements is true – from the most intense revolt to the blindest submission, it's all false.... But I hear very strongly (not for myself, for mankind): AWAKE AND WILL.... And it's as if it were the key that opens the door to the future.... For man, the supreme realization is understanding – understanding things. For the Supermind, realization is Power, it is creative will... tomorrow's realization." ...

The end of Machinery. All necessities of life created and fashioned, or refashioned, by the direct power of consciousness. But let us be clear: that unknown consciousness is not up above, in some superintellect; it is, on the contrary, at the other end of things, in the depths of the body, at the end of graves and Hell, where the miracle of a first life emerged from a first magma of plasma and steam. ...I listened to her, heard her moan, and then her radiant smile, always, "It's as if a superhuman Power were trying to manifest through millennia of powerlessness. And a superhuman Power is trying to... is pressing here to manifest. ...In

Savitri, he clearly says, 'Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells...' He says it clearly: it's THERE, inside, within the very cells. It must be done NOW. It is now..."

But that is not the last act of the Tragedy. Because it is the very Tragedy of our Earth. ...In truth, every man repeats the mystery of all centuries and of the whole species; only, he does not always know it. The moment he knows it, he enters Destiny. ...

If we knew how to catch hold of Sophocles' blue gaze...

And we hear the coryphaeus' voice to Electra:
Electra, think You were born of a mortal.
Orestes too was mortal;
This is a fate we all must suffer,
Do not weep too much.

Or what vibrates in the voice of Odysseus to Zeus's daughter Athena when the door closes on Ajax struck with madness:

Are we not all here, all living things,
Mere phantoms,
Shadows of nothing?

Twenty-five centuries later, Sri Aurobindo is another gaze on the same question – but with a will, or a Destiny, to find the answer, the true answer, the solution, the true solution. (*The Tragedy of the Earth*, p. 19-26)

What answer did Sri Aurobindo bring to the question of Being? What true solution? Let us listen again, for his answer comes on the wings of a great soul rhythm, to be seen and heard by the listening soul who is ready to hear. As we have mentioned briefly in this study, and discussed at length elsewhere, it is indeed the divine Word, the word of Truth, which is able to reveal itself as the One in all, and make the soul a vessel of divine Power. Therefore, it is at this point in our study that we would turn to a reading from *Savitri*, in an "Immersion Workshop," to hear Sri Aurobindo's complete answer. In this context, we shall only gather a few more pertinent fragments from *Savitri* in our attempt to piece together the mystery of Being. Let us listen to one such fragment that recalls, as is

so often the case, the Mother's words:

In our body's cells there sits a hidden Power
That sees the unseen and plans eternity...

A work is done in the deep silences;
A glory and wonder of spiritual sense,
A laughter in beauty's everlasting space
Transforming world-experience into joy,
Inhabit the mystery of the untouched gulfs;
Lulled by Time's beats eternity sleeps in us.
In the sealed hermetic heart, the happy core,
Unmoved behind this outer shape of death
The eternal Entity prepares within
Its matter of divine felicity,
Its reign of heavenly phenomenon. ...

Our error crucifies Reality
To force its birth and divine body here,
Compelling, incarnate in a human form
And breathing in limbs that one can touch and clasp,
Its Knowledge to rescue an ancient Ignorance,
Its saviour light the inconscient universe.
And when that greater Self comes sea-like down
To fill this image of our transience,
All shall be captured by delight, transformed:
In waves of undreamed ecstasy shall roll
Our mind and life and sense and laugh in a light
Other than this hard limited human day,
The body's tissues thrill apotheosised,
Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis. (*Savitri*, II.V.169-71)

Sri Aurobindo's solution, and the Mother's sacrifice, was the transformation of mind, life, and body into a channel and vessel of that truth of Being which our "image of transience" always secretly was, even in its ever-changing forms of mortality and ignorance. Man is a transitional being, and his life a "passing-away," but mankind is also a crossing-over, capable of conscious being, and as such, of Being,

conscious of itself. That is mankind's highest mental possibility. As Heidegger wisely recognized, it is Man's essence to become conscious of Being, and by doing so to go out beyond himself toward all-Being. Or, as Nietzsche discovered in Zarathustra's tragic over-coming, it is also his destiny to accept all, as a mother does by self-giving in birth, such that every destruction is redeemed, as a necessity of creation.

But this is man's tragic destiny, not Being's. Being is the Immortal in mortals, the Force behind every form, the possibility of every being to persist through change and to fulfill a destiny. The "care," and "faith in the future," and "heroic sacrifice," which are held up by the postmodern prophets of transcendence as ultimate "ends of man," and therefore the meaning of our existence, are fundamental aspects of human being and of human understanding of Being. But these aspects, or expressed powers and potentialities, of Being do not pass away with their transient forms. They persist through Time, even as their momentary formations crumble and fade. The eternal powers of Being last through every change and temporal expression, as the truth-force present in those changing formations; and the climb up the ladder of Immortality continues in spite of the phenomenon of mortality that predominates in our experience of Being. This "holocaust of the soul," is "the Eternal's dreadful strategy," and sacrifice and self-giving are, from the point of view of the Divine Mother, the essence of Being, and source of all Power and Bliss.

Beyond our human experience and understanding, says Sri Aurobindo, is the possibility of a transformed consciousness and a new form of manifestation, a new being of Being, made possible by a Divine Will in evolution. And just as every form of transitory, mortal manifestation is now a deformation of a secret immortal Bliss, it is the Bliss of Immortality that shall characterize the overt experiences, forms, and processes of that new being, materially and sensually conscious of the Truth of Being.

The Mother said it was her body's consciousness that knew the Power of the Absolute, as utter stillness and utter energy combined. Therefore, the perception of our ordinary human power as a "power only for death

and destruction," to use Satprem's expression, is THE Illusion. It is a consciousness of the limitations of the human being, by the human being, but not a consciousness of Being as such, in its infinite and eternal aspect of Consciousness-Force. It is the error of the Buddhist's "little mind" with its attachments and consequent suffering on the wheel of rebirth. It is Nietzsche's contempt for transience, which leads him to the "overman." But this "overman" is still "man," tragic man, not super-man, and as such not a true solution, although it is an approach, a first step, perhaps, on the bridge-across.

Jaques Derrida, in his insightful interpretations of Heidegger, has provided an important key to understanding this essential, problematical feature of Heidegger's conception of Being, which seems to have led Heidegger quite naturally to identify with, and possibly to take his cue from, Nietzsche's tragic sense of *the eternal return of the same* and *will-to-power*, as adequate definitions of the essence of Being. And the same problematical feature seems to have led Satprem, in his interpretation of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to characterize man's fate as one of "only destruction and death." But these "conceptions" of Being, – at the highest range of mental understanding – are still only human conceptions. Derrida points out that "Heidegger's thought (in *Being and Time*) is guided by the motif of the proximity of Being to the essence of man," and he makes this important and striking observation: "It remains that the thinking of Being, the thinking of the truth of Being, in the name of which Heidegger de-limits humanism and metaphysics, remains as thinking of man. Man and the name of man are not displaced in the question of Being such as it is put to metaphysics. Even less do they disappear. On the contrary, at issue is a kind of reevaluation or revalorization of the essence and dignity of man. What is threatened in the extension of metaphysics and technology – and we know the essential necessity that leads Heidegger to associate them one to another – is the essence of man, which here would have to be thought before and beyond its metaphysical determinations. *The widely and rapidly spreading devastation of language not only undermines aesthetic and moral responsibility in every use of language; it arises from a*

*threat to the essence of humanity. ...Where else does 'care' tend but in the direction of bringing man back to his essence? What else does that in turn betoken but that man becomes human? Thus, humanitas really does remain the concern of such thinking. For this is humanism: meditating and caring that man be human and not inhumane, 'inhuman,' that is, outside his essence. But in what does the humanity of man consist? It lies in his essence (from Heidegger's, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, p.198-202)." (*Margins of Philosophy*, p. 128-129)*

Here we get a glimpse of the grave conclusion to which Heidegger was drawn by his analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy of *eternal return of the same* and *will-to-power*. In the last volume of his study, Heidegger writes: *The Overman simply leaves the man of traditional values behind, overtakes him, and transfers the justification for all laws and the positing of all values to the empowering of power. An act or accomplishment is valid as such only to the extent that it serves to equip, nurture, and enhance will to power.* (*Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 6)

The catastrophe for the Twentieth Century, in Heidegger's interpretation, is that the metaphysics of the will-to-power led to the dangerously exclusive assumption of power and validity by "calculative thinking" and "technology," which threaten humanity's potential for "the thinking of Being," which is its essence, at its very roots.

It is important for us to grasp the relevance of these philosophical insights, in the context of our study of the Divine Mother, and to reaffirm that the essence and being of man are indeed threatened today, as never before. And it is by those same powerful and dominant extensions of his being, in the form of communications and production technologies, by which he would establish a lasting and invulnerable world power, that he is likely to be undone. The tragic outcome of his illusion of the proximity of immortality, to be achieved through economic and military global dominance, will inevitably entail a magnitude of death and destruction, over time, from which it is unlikely that the human being will survive in its present form. The theme of "world domination," discussed at length by Heidegger in his study of

Nietzsche, has come to the forefront of our concern again today, with constant daily references in the media to the games of nuclear-arms brinksmanship being played out between nations, to national economies being destroyed and governments collapsing under economic pressures brought on them by the controllers of world-economic power, and to the depletion and pollution of global water resources and food supplies, and destruction of the planet's ecology, as a result of a globally unsustainable human population growth, leading to famine, disease and revolt. All of these global crises are reported daily along with mundane news, advertising, and entertainment as though they were all equally dispensable bits of information to be deferred to another time.

But are these looming threats to human existence indications of the loss of its "essence," its Being? In fact, aren't they perfectly justifiable in terms of the nature of that Being itself, in the terms by which it has been understood by Nietzsche and Heidegger? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger has offered a detailed discussion of death as a necessary component of man's Being, as essential as its will-to-power and its tragic spirit: "*As the end of Da-sein, death is the ownmost nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and not to be bypassed possibility of Da-sein. As the end of Da-sein, death is in the being of this being-toward-its-end. ...The problem of the possible wholeness of the being which we ourselves actually are exists justifiably if care, as the fundamental constitution of Da-sein, "is connected" with death as the most extreme possibility of this being*" (*Being and Time*, p. 239).

It is man's essence to know Being, as the Being of man, through its proximity to man, and by this knowing man transcends himself. But Being is known through man's powerlessness. Its Immortality is known through his mortality. Its infinity is known through his finite awareness. It is his transitory reality that enables him to conceive of the Idea, of the Timeless in the infinite diversity of its beings in time. Is it not, then, perfectly consistent with this understanding of Being that in the very threat to its existence Mankind comes into the greatest possible fullness of Being? And might this not be the most logical and consistent end-of-

man, in the hour of greatest threat, to realize in this paradox of Being and mortality that is his essence, the will to surpass himself, and to become the “overman?”

The true solution, and the definitive transcendence, lies in the surpassing of man. And this solution is made possible by the manifestation of Being in a new form – one with not only the consciousness of Being, but with the Power of Being. And the way to this overcoming has been described in detail, and its experience narrated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, at the inevitable end of an epoch of the dominance of the mental, when the tragedy of man and his essence of mortality threatens to become the tragedy of the Earth. But it is now that the possibility of a true transcendence, and the realization of an absolute stillness and power, can reverse the very process of mortality. And in this process of reversal, the destiny of the Earth may be held in a protective embrace, as the old and devalued forms crumble, and the new takes birth, emerging slowly into Being, as forms radiant with the delight and power of a divine Will-Force.

This is the process proclaimed by *Savitri*, the creative Word and luminous Force that descends in the mortal to effect this transformation. And the inevitable future is made explicit by this Word:

Even should a hostile force cling to its reign
And claim its right's perpetual sovereignty
And man refuse his high spiritual fate,
Yet shall the secret Truth in things prevail.
For in the march of all-fulfilling Time
The hour must come of the Transcendent's will:
All turns and winds towards his predestined ends
In Nature's fixed inevitable course
Decreed since the beginning of the worlds
In the deep essence of created things:
Even there shall come as a high crown of all
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.
But first high Truth must set her feet on earth

And man aspire to the Eternal's light
And all his members feel the Spirit's touch
And all his life obey an inner Force.
This too shall be; for a new life shall come,
A body of the Superconscient's truth,
A native field of Supernature's might:
It shall make earth's nescient ground Truth's colony,
Make even the Ignorance a transparent robe
Through which shall shine the brilliant limbs of Truth
And Truth shall be a sun on Nature's head
And Truth shall be the guide of Nature's steps
And Truth shall gaze out of her nether deeps.
When superman is born as Nature's king
His presence shall transfigure Matter's world:
He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's night,
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's greater law;
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's call.
Awake to his hidden possibility,
Awake to all that slept within his heart
And all that Nature meant when earth was formed
And the Spirit made this ignorant world his home,
He shall aspire to Truth and God and Bliss.
Interpreter of a diviner law
And instrument of a supreme design,
The higher kind shall lean to lift up man.
Man shall desire to climb to his own heights.
The truth above shall wake a nether truth,
Even the dumb earth become a sentient force.
The Spirit's tops and Nature's base shall draw
Near to the secret of their separate truth
And know each other as one deity.
The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face. (*Savitri*, XI.I.708-9)

The descent of this transforming force and the emergence of the divine consciousness-force in man is perhaps the last tragedy. For this force,

symbolically named by Sri Aurobindo Savitri, has to confront death in us, as it did in the Mother, and in that confrontation the essence of man must be transformed. This is the true possibility, the responsibility, of the "overman," and the process of the divine change.

But first the spirit's ascent we must achieve
Out of the chasm from which our nature rose.
The soul must soar sovereign above the form
And climb to summits beyond mind's half-sleep;
Our hearts we must inform with heavenly strength,
Surprise the animal with the occult god.
Then kindling the gold tongue of sacrifice,
Calling the powers of a bright hemisphere,
We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,
Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent,
Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire. (*Savitri*, II.V.171-2)

Bibliography

Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri, A Legend and A Symbol*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1950, Revised Ed., 1996.

_____, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1940, 1997.

_____, *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 25, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1971.

_____, *The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, Vol. 15, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1971.

Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy*, Alan Bass trans., The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Gebser, Jean, *The Ever-Present Origin*, Noel Barstad trans., Ohio University Press, 1985.

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, Joan Stambaugh trans., State University of New York, 1996.

_____, *Nietzsche*, Vols. 1-2, 3-4, David F. Krell trans, Harper & Row, 1979.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Walter Kaufmann trans., Viking Penguin, Inc., 1966.

Satprem ed./The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 10, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris, 1998.

Satprem, *The Tragedy of the Earth*, Institut de Recherches Evolutive, Paris, 1998.

SUPPLEMENTS

(1) On Mantric Traditions: the teachings of Kukai and Sri Aurobindo

In the 9th century a Japanese Buddhist monk named Kukai founded a school of Vajrayana Buddhism which is still alive today in Japan, known as Shingon (meaning mantra). Kukai taught the Mahavairocana Sutra and other sacred Buddhist texts and practices in Sanskrit that he brought to Japan from China. He also taught bija or root sound mantras and commented extensively on them. This is one such mantra: A Va Ra Ha Kha Hum. The syllables, according to Kukai, were interpreted as follows: A = the unborn, earth; Va = something language cannot communicate, water; Ra = free from all that is elemental, fire; Ha = what transcends causality, wind; Kha = the void, space; Hum = consciousness of that. His poetic interpretation of the mantra, or its meaning, translates as:

I have realized that which is unborn.

It is that which language cannot communicate.

It is free from all defilements.

It transcends causality.

I know this void that is like space.

It is important to note that the meaning given to the root sounds, and their elemental associations with earth, fire, wind, space, has the intention of creating in the mind a consciousness of emptiness. This is of course one of the fundamental goals of Vajrayana Buddhist practice. According to Kukai, the practitioner who repeats the mantra a million times will attain an understanding of all scripture. We might think of this goal as what is known in the Tibetan Vajrayana teaching of Dzogchen as one in which the “spontaneous arising of clear light mind” is realized, whose characteristic is emptiness and perfection. In it all things that arise in time and space are known as that.

This state of consciousness emphasized in Buddhism is one that strikes

me as being what is also referred to in Hindu yoga texts as the *akshara* or *sat purusha*. A verse that relates this experience in the Upanishads says "That Self, there and there, He am I." In many of the cantos of *Savitri* this state is invoked as a necessary prerequisite to the descent of the *mahashakti* and realization of the *param purusha* or *ishwara*. It is brought about through the rejection of thoughts and emotions, and through achieving a profound state of stillness in which one can become conscious of the one Self of all, witness of all, yet unmoving and unmoved behind the play of differences. It is said to be "without scar of imperfection."

If we take the further realization of the *param purusha* to be the desirable goal beyond pure and absolute emptiness, then we can perhaps invest those same seed sounds with this intention. For example, we might assign to A Va Ra Ha Kha Hum the meaning: earth the foundation, water the pure birth, fire the creator will, wind the ascending spirit, space the soul of luminous truth, in which I behold the absolute bliss.

Performing this transposition of intention, we could come up with a kind of Vedic interpretation of the same mantra, as an invocation and affirmation of the supreme truth-consciousness:

O Earth the foundation, Water the pure birth, Fire the creator will,
Air the ascending spirit, Bliss the conscious truth of being,
O Divine Body, Life, Mind, Psychic sun, and Supermind,
Descend with the seeds of all creation,
That all may return to thee in time, and embody divine perfection.

Then *Avarahkha* becomes virtually identical with *Omnamobhagavate*. Since it has traditionally been used to signify emptiness, it may not be so easy to make it carry this heightened meaning. Perhaps we would need to add the syllables *sachchidananda* before the *hum*. But at the same time, since the absolute emptiness contains the divine bliss, and out of it comes all creation, there is no reason why it cannot have this meaning, if we choose for it to be so, and convey through it this truth. The principle of mantra depends on the

meaning and intention that radiates through the consciousness of the yogi in the form of sounds and meanings that should invoke certain spiritual presences and truths. The yogi imbues the words with a specific meaning and transmits that realization to others through the sounds.

The advantage to chanting *Savitri* (1950) is that the meanings given to the sounds by Sri Aurobindo are already signified, more or less, by the words themselves, and there is no need to impose on them a mystical or spiritual interpretation. But the formulation and interpretation are still true only if we hear and feel the intention that he has put into them. They have to attune us to their meaning. Kukai undoubtedly spent a lifetime attuning his disciples to the meanings of the sutras and mantras that he used to embody the truths that he had realized, and that they represented.

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo frequently presents these two ideas or states of consciousness – emptiness and fruition, let us say – in succession, as if they were somehow necessary to each other. For example, in the yoga of *Savitri* narrated in Book Seven, Canto Five:

In a simple purity of emptiness
Her mind knelt down before the Unknowable.

...

In endless Time her soul reached a wide end,
The spaceless Vast became her spirit's place. (*Savitri*, VII.V.522-3)

This experience seems quite parallel, if not identical, to the one related by Kukai. And in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo similarly relates the experience of Aswapati (the Hero), achieved through a lifetime of *yoga tapasya*, in Book Three, Canto One:

A Vastness brooded free from sense of Space,
An Everlastingness cut off from Time;
A strange, sublime, inalterable Peace
Silent rejected from its world and soul.

...

There was no mind there with its need to know,

There was no heart there with its need to love.
All person perished in its namelessness. (*Savitri*, III.I.308)

The great stride taken by Sri Aurobindo in his yoga of transformation is of course revealed to Aswapati just beyond, or perhaps within, this state of absolute emptiness. But its justification, as well as that of its prerequisite emptiness, is also stated frequently and explicitly, as in these lines also from Book Three, Canto Two:

A high and blank negation is not all,
A huge extinction is not God's last word,
Life's ultimate sense, the close of being's course,
The meaning of this great mysterious world.
In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power. (*Savitri*, III.II.311)

It is the awakening of that Power, and its descent into the vacant heart and soul of the spiritual aspirant that is given equal importance, and receives the ultimate emphasis, by the mantra of transformation. In the yoga of *Savitri*, it has this formulation:

As in a flash from a supernal light,
A living image of the original Power,
A face, a form came down into her heart
And made of it its temple and pure abode.

...

All underwent a high celestial change:
Breaking the black Inconscient's blind mute wall,
Effacing the circles of the Ignorance,
Powers and divinities burst flaming forth;
Each part of the being trembling with delight
Lay overwhelmed with tides of happiness
And saw her hand in every circumstance
And felt her touch in every limb and cell. (*Savitri*, VII.V.528-9)

The result of this *yoga tapasya*, however, is a transformation that goes far beyond the experience of the descent of a divine force into the yogi's vacant heart and mind. And this is the importance of the step taken in the history of spiritual evolution by Sri Aurobindo:

A divine Puissance then takes Nature's place
And pushes the movements of our body and mind;
Possessor of our passionate hopes and dreams,
The beloved despot of our thoughts and acts,
She streams into us with her unbound force,
Into mortal limbs the Immortal's power.
An inner law of beauty shapes our lives;
Our words become the natural speech of Truth,
Each thought is a ripple on a sea of Light. (*Savitri*, VII.V.530-1)

Just as the Mahavairocana Sutra prepares the ground for Avarahakhahum, so *Savitri* prepares the ground for Omnamobhagavate. But Omnamobhagavatevasudevaya, like Omnamahshivaya, are ancient mantras of liberation that invoked and affirmed the Supreme Lord as the end and beginning of all creation yet free from both, – or as Sri Aurobindo chants in *Savitri*, “*the pure existence ever the same/the sheer consciousness and absolute force/the unimaginable and formless bliss/the triune being who is all and one/and yet no one but himself apart.*” A new ground of spiritual truth and aspiration has been prepared by *Savitri*, and a new intention – the spiritual transformation of matter, life, and mind – has been given, which transforms both the mantra and the purpose or end with which it has been invested by the master yogi. The emptiness comes to fruition not in liberation but in transformation.

Knowing this, we can understand better the Mother's statements regarding the revelation of the secrets of all yogas by *Savitri*, as well as the continuity in the traditions and in their use of mantra, between the yoga schools of Hinduism and Buddhism. Sri Aurobindo has applied this knowledge in his yoga of supramental transformation, and in its transmission to us through the mantric verses of *Savitri*.

The fullest and most perfect formulation in *Savitri* of the mantra of transformation, and the one that most perfectly combines and transforms the two mantric traditions, as well as defining the relation between nature and soul, Matter and Spirit, is this, from Book Seven, Canto Six:

Banish all thought from thee and be God's void.
Then shalt thou uncover the Unknowable
And the Superconscient conscious grow on thy tops;
Infinity's vision through thy gaze shall pierce;
Thou shalt look into the eyes of the Unknown,
Find the hid truth in things seen null and false,
Behind things known discover Mystery's rear.
Thou shalt be one with God's bare reality
And the miraculous world he has become
And the diviner miracle still to be
When Nature who is now unconscious god
Translucent grows to the Eternal's light,
Her seeing his sight, her walk his steps of power
And life is filled with a spiritual joy
And Matter is the Spirit's willing bride.
Consent to be nothing and none, dissolve Time's work,
Cast off thy mind, step back from form and name.
Annul thyself that only God may be." (*Savitri*, VII.VI.537-8)

Annul thyself that only God may be. Isn't that the meaning of Om Namō Bhagavate?

Among the many commentaries on the yoga of supramental transformation in the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *Mother's Agenda* is above all a record of her experience of transformation. In it we find this, in 1965 (Vol. 6):

Of all the formulas or mantras, the one that has the most direct effect on this body is the Sanskrit mantra: Om Namō Bhagavate. The first word, OM, represents the supreme invocation, the invocation of the Supreme. The second word, NAMO, represents total self-giving, perfect surrender. The third word, BHAGAVATE, represents the aspiration, what the manifestation must become – Divine. ...

When I sit in meditation or I have a minute of quiet concentration, this mantra arises from the solar plexus, and there is a response in the cells of the body: they all start vibrating. Everything gets filled with Light! ...

I am absolutely convinced that the life of this body – what makes it move and progress – can be replaced by a force. That is, a sort of immortality can develop and the body's wear and tear can disappear. These two things are possible: the power of life can develop and the wear and tear can disappear. This can evolve psychologically, through total obedience to the divine Impulsion, so that at every moment the necessary force is there and the necessary action is performed.

The idea that is reinforced throughout the Agenda is that the mantra "Omnambhagavate" is a mantra of self-abnegation, of surrender to the supreme divine force. Then we come back to the descriptions of mind and life being replaced by the divine force in *Savitri*,

The immortal's thoughts displaced our bounded view,
The immortal's thoughts earth's drab idea and sense;
All things now bore a deeper heavenlier sense.
A glad clear harmony marked their truth's outline,
Reset the balance and measures of the world.
Each shape showed its occult design, unveiled
God's meaning for which it was made
And the vivid splendour of his artist thought.
A channel of the mighty Mother's choice,
The immortal's will took into its calm control
Our blind or erring government of life;
A loose republic once of wants and needs,
Then bowed to the uncertain sovereign mind,
Life now obeyed to a diviner rule
And every act became an act of God. (*Savitri*, VII.V.529)

To understand how this change comes about, we must necessarily recall the imperative declaration in *Savitri* which gives the key to this change and provides the closest sense and meaning of the mantra *Omnambhagavate*: "Annul thyself, that only God may be." And then the crucial transition, and the mysterious combination, the dis- or replacement:

This void held more than all the teeming worlds,
This blank felt more than all that time has borne,

This dark knew dumbly, immensely the Unknown.
But all was formless, voiceless, infinite. ...

At last a change approached, the emptiness broke; ...

Heaven leaned low to kiss the sacred hill,
The air trembled with passion and delight. (*Savitri*, VII.V.522-3)

Her vacant heart was like a stringless harp;
Impassive the body claimed not its own voice,
But let the luminous greatness through it pass.

A dual Power at being's occult poles
Still acted, nameless and invisible:

Her divine emptiness was their instrument. (*Savitri*, VII.VII.553)

Through a comparison of certain Shingon texts of Kukai (a.k.a. Kobo Daishi) and passages from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, we may begin to discover how the mantra is used in certain Hindu (Adwaita Vedanta) and Buddhist (Vajrayana) traditions by master yogis to impart specific states of consciousness. Mantras are understood by the practitioners of these esoteric traditions to be "words of power." They are intended to convey directly to the perception of the hearer the understanding, knowledge, or state of consciousness that they express. It is because of this that the Mother is able to say of a specific mantra, that it "has the most effect" on her body. And the nature of the effect that she refers to is described extensively both by her in the *Agenda* and by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. It is a concrete, definable, spiritual perception and consciousness.

Similarly, in the teachings of Kukai we find elaborate descriptions of the desired states of consciousness to be realized, and the words of power that somehow represent and facilitate those states. In a treatise titled *Principles for Attaining Buddhahood in This Body* by Kukai, these instructions, definitions, and objectives are stated:

(1) The *Diamond Peak Sutra* says,
"Those who practice this Samadhi
Will realize Buddha's Bodhi with the present (body)."

“This Samadhi” refers to the Samadhi of One Letter (i.e. BHRUM) representing the Bhagavat Mahavairocana incarnated as a Golden Cakravartin.

(2) Again, it is said,

“If there are beings who encounter this teaching
And practice it diligently, day and night, throughout the four periods of
day,
They will attain the stage of Joy in this life
And realize Enlightenment after sixteen lives.”

(3) Again, it is said,

“If one practices in accordance with this supreme principle,
One will attain the highest Enlightenment in this life.”

(4) Again, it is said,

“You should know that your
Body becomes the Vajradhatu.
When your body has become Vajra,
It is firm, solid and indestructible.
I have attained the Vajra-body.”

(5) The *Mahavairocana Sutra* says,

“Without abandoning this body,
One attains supernatural power over the objective world,
Wanders freely in the state of great void,
And, moreover, accomplishes the Bodily Mystery.”

(6) Again, it says,

“If you want to enter Perfection (Siddhi) in this life,
Comply with (your Buddha’s) empowerment and contemplate on it.
After receiving the Mantra (of your Buddha) personally from your
reverend teacher.
Meditate on it until you become united with it. Then you will attain
perfection.”

The “Perfection” mentioned in the sutra refers to the Perfection (of five supernatural powers, etc.) by holding the Mantra and the Perfection of the Buddhahood of Dharmakaya. “The state of great void” means that Dharmakaya is unhindered like the great space, contains all the phenomenal forms and is everlasting; hence, “great void”. It is the basis on which all existing things rest; hence, “state”.

(7) Also it is said in the Bodhisattva Nagarjuna's *Treatise on Bodhi-Mind*, "In the Mantra teaching alone is found (the theory of) attaining Buddhahood with the present body. Hence, it expounds the method of Samadhi. It is not found or mentioned in the various other teachings." (Kobu Daishi, *Sokushin-jobutsu-gi*, trans. Hisao Inagahi, E-sangha, Nov. 30, 2003)

For those unfamiliar with Buddhist and Sanskrit terminology, *bodhi* is a term for enlightenment or realization, *vajra* is used variously to mean thunderbolt, lightning, and diamond, *vairocana* means the sun of enlightenment, and Mahavairocana is the name for the primordial Buddha or eternal source of truth, who sits at the center of the Buddhist mandalas and is the source of all buddhas and paths, *cakravartin* (chakravartin) is the term for the perfect or ideal earthly ruler, and a *siddhi* is a spiritual power and attainment. We can easily discover many parallels between these traditional concepts and terms and the images used by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. For example, upon hearing the sacred Voice or "word" that calls her to yoga, as if from her own higher Self, Savitri seems to become that solid and indestructible body and diamond peak vision:

Above her brows where will and knowledge meet
A mighty Voice invaded mortal space.
It seemed to come from inaccessible heights
And yet was intimate with all the world
And knew the meaning of the steps of Time
And saw eternal destiny's changeless scene
Filling the far prospect of the cosmic gaze.
As the voice touched, her body became a stark
And rigid golden statue of motionless trance,
A stone of God lit by an amethyst soul.
Around her body's stillness all grew still. (*Savitri*, VII.II.474)

And after her sojourn through the void (Dharmakaya), Savitri finally meets her secret soul, and it is as though she meets that same sun of truth symbolized by the Bhagavan Mahavairocana, along with all the divinities of the descending planes of existence:

A sealed identity within her woke;
 She knew herself the Beloved of the Supreme:
 These Gods and Goddesses were he and she:
 The Mother was she of Beauty and Delight,
 The Word in Brahma's vast creating clasp,
 The World-Puissance on almighty Shiva's lap, -
 The Master and the Mother of all lives
 Watching the worlds their twin regard had made,
 And Krishna and Radha for ever entwined in bliss,
 The Adorer and Adored self-lost and one.
 In the last chamber on a golden seat
 One sat whose shape no vision could define;
 Only one felt the world's unattainable fount,
 A Power of which she was a straying Force,
 An invisible Beauty, goal of the world's desire,
 A Sun of which all knowledge is a beam,
 A Greatness without whom no life could be. (*Savitri*, VII.V.525)

Perhaps we are prepared at this point, by the references to *mantra* that have been gathered and the spiritual states that such words of power can apparently invoke, to ask how this happens? What is the relationship between the word and the experience that enables this process to take place? What is its principle? And what does this tell us about the nature of language, reality, and ourselves?

To begin to answer these questions, let us turn first to the traditional teachings of Vedanta and Yoga on the subject. SwamiVishnu Devananda, in his classical and comprehensive compendium on Hindu yoga systems, says this:

Mantras are Sanskrit invocations of the supreme Being. Reinforced and propelled by *japa* meditation (repetition of the words, either audibly, whispered, or in a concentrated mental silence), they pass from the verbal level through the mental and telepathic states, and on to pure thought energy. ... As a specialized sound-body of consciousness, the Mantra is the deity itself. The form of the deity manifests as the visible portion of the sound. The Mantra, therefore, must be repeated in

the proper way, with attention to the syllables and rhythm. ... Every true Mantra fulfills six conditions. 1) It was originally revealed to a sage, who achieved self-realization through it and passed it down to others. 2) It has a presiding deity and 3) a specific meter. 4) It possesses a *bija*, or seed, investing it with a special power that is the essence of the Mantra. 5) It has dynamic divine power, or *Shakti*. 6) There is a plug that conceals the pure consciousness hidden in the Mantra. As soon as the plug is removed by constant prolonged repetition, pure consciousness is revealed, and the devotee receives the vision of his deity." (*Meditation and Mantras*, Japa Meditation Practice, 1978)

The aspects of *mantra* given the greatest emphasis and value by Sri Aurobindo are the quality of the inspiration, the quality of the sound, and the quality of the consequent "seeing" or realization. Let us note here also that *mantra* and *japa* have been defined by Devananda in terms of the traditional knowledge of yoga systems and Sanskrit usage. Another term that may concern us is *sutra*, which is an aphoristic form of verse used to communicate the philosophy, psychology, cosmology – and generally the wisdom – of the Sanskritic spiritual traditions. It should be clear that the principles of *mantra* can be present in both *japa* and *sutra*. It should also be obvious that *Savitri* could be considered in each of these categories. Various comments made by the Mother about the importance, for the aspirant, of reading *Savitri* frequently, about the knowledge of yoga and nature and the cosmos contained in it, and about its ability to serve one as the guide to the highest realizations of the yoga of transformation, indicate that it should in fact be considered in all three categories of spiritual speech/writing. Because it is such a creation, it is able to transmit and build up in the consciousness of one who hears its formulations of sound and syntax, of rhythm, image, idea and meaning, the spiritual states of which it speaks. Its presiding deity is of course *Savitri*, the creative word and force of the Supreme.

Conclusion: Postmodernism and Spirituality

Let us now attempt to put the questions that we have asked into a philosophical perspective, and perhaps make some progress toward achieving a better understanding of this mysterious power of speech. To

do this, it may help us to utilize some of the tools of Western philosophy, especially those of phenomenology and fundamental ontology developed by Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida, as well as the tools of Vedanta as formulated and developed by Sri Aurobindo.

What we usually mean by human consciousness is a perception of the world of forms and patterns in and around us, and our ability to have feelings and thoughts about that world of perception. How we happen to be able to have such perceptions and thoughts in the first place, or how the world we experience produces them in us, is still a mystery. It is this mystery of being and knowing, of perception and meaning, consciousness of self and world, that provides the primary subject matter of philosophy. And to heighten the mystery, there is the amazing phenomenon of language that mediates this world of experience, perception and thought that we call human consciousness. With it we are able to relate meaningfully to our world, and to question its meaning.

The paradigm of understanding that is emerging through this process of essential questioning holds that our conscious perceptions mirror the patterns and processes that actually exist in substantial material, vital, and mental forms, and that these objects of consciousness are somehow both a part of our reflecting self and yet other than it. We are also able to remember or store traces of the forms that we perceive, including our own thoughts and feelings, and draw upon that unconscious store of invisible impressions, spontaneously or at will. Because the world of recurring forms and patterns that we experience is to a considerable extent logical, predictable, and consistent, our thoughts and impressions tend to be like the world they mirror. But our thought is also capable of theorizing, imagining, and creating systems of poetry and philosophy, fiction and drama, religion and art and science that are more real and powerful to us than the empirical world of experience that is their foundation. These systems of thought, which we think of as the higher mental or spiritual dimension of our consciousness, have an enormous influence on the "other" world of "material" forms and forces. They color it with their values and shape it with their spiritual force.

And here we glimpse the origin of the fundamental dichotomy in human consciousness, between the physical and the spiritual, the sensible and the intelligible, matter and mind. But phenomenology, in the most recent decades of philosophical thought, – which we term the postmodern period, – has reached the relatively enlightened conclusion that the forms of thought and the forms of matter and life are variations of the same; they have a relationship of identity and yet of difference; they reflect each other; matter, life, mind, and spirit are planes of the same reality, differentiated only by levels of energy and principles of organization.

Everything is the same, and yet nothing is the same. The identity of each form or pattern is determined by its duration and its difference from other forms and patterns in time and space. Its duration and difference are its being, and that being is also what we call consciousness; it is what is absent in the presence of things. The level of reality at which forms, patterns and principles exist, in a world of ceaseless transformations of energy and constant change, is the plane of the idea, the concept, the symbol – the objects of mental consciousness. But what we call duration and difference, pattern and permanence, as a whole, *is* Consciousness. And the world that it mirrors and understands is its world of Force. They are variations of the same reality, a perpetual differentiation in time and space, obverse and reverse of the Same. With this thought, phenomenology approaches the Vedantic understanding of the Self or Purusha, one in all, and Prakriti, its dynamic force-nature.

Language and symbol, at the ordinary mental level of humanity, reflect the reality of experience and perception at that level. If I say, “You have the tea and I’ll have the coffee,” we understand exactly the complex conditions, causes, preferences, actual physical circumstances that make the statement meaningful, and we act accordingly. In every aspect of the situation we perceive difference and yet we know the sameness in the patterns. This basic nature of reality is called *differance* by Derrida, basing his thought on the idea of identity and difference in the relationship of Being to beings, and of concepts to things, developed first by Heidegger and Husserl. But if everything is Force and Difference,

what is The Same, what is Being?

In Sri Aurobindo's terms, it is the Self, and it is the Infinite, – the one that becomes the many and is yet none. Now, if That is present – as the Presence – in everything, from the most material to the most ethereal, from the highest universal principles to the minutest particles of energy, and if That finds a mortal Voice – if a human being's consciousness raises its vibrational level and expands into the plane of pure principle (sometimes referred to as the plane of the "gods"), while still being grounded in a physical body, – its permanence and stability combined with its circumstances of complex differentiation produce formulations of thought and speech that convey a higher than the ordinary perception. Its vibrations and quanta of consciousness-force can convey Beauty and Truth, Life and Bliss, Suffering and Death, Love and Compassion, in sounds and images, feelings and meanings, as concretely as tea and coffee. It can convey perfectly its awareness of the beauty in the principle of Fibonacci numbers, for example, as they repeat themselves in all the forms of life. It can convey the power of the principle of Nature, or Prakriti, to infinitely diversify its immortal patterns in time and space. It can convey the permanence and imperturbability of its principle of causal being, in the changing forms of beings, and in perceptions of their underlying truth. That Permanence is its Stillness. Its Identity is their Difference; its Consciousness their Force.

At one point in time this "spiritual" consciousness might set in motion a path of liberation and compassion for an emergent humanity; at another it might call down a force to abolish suffering and evolve a superhumanity and life divine. These are the perceptions and words that mark an epoch and constitute hope for the future, the seed sounds and thoughts that affirm the promise of the eternal return and abundance of the Same in Time.

From time immemorial there have been mystics and seers who have grasped the incomprehensible and brought its force to bear on humanity. Those are the minds that have seen the Self in all, and in that perception they have declared the unity of truth, as in Sri Aurobindo's

mantric verse: *Truth made the world, not a blind nature-force*. But this is not “truth” as we normally think of it; not an adequate or brilliant adjustment of perception to reality, of thought to experience. This truth *is* the world of perception *and* the infinite diversity of form and force. It is the Self that is the same, and *differance* is its way of being. Thus it is Time and Space, and yet its experience is an Effulgence, timeless and spaceless, an effulgence of self-giving, an infinite of compassion, a perfect Emptiness, Mother and Master of all the worlds, Mahavairocana.

Philosophy has begun to approach a thought and speech that comprehends the Infinite. Mantra is the power to reveal it. It is the Infinite in mortal form, the sign of Immortal Energy, and its condition is a spiritual perception that is able to, as Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*: “In living symbols study reality/And learn the logic of the Infinite.”

Om Namo Bhagavate.

Kukai (774-835),
popularly known by the
name of Kobo Daishi:
The essential substance
of the universe,
according to Kukai, is
the six elements, (six
mahabhutas), viz.,
earth, water, fire, wind,
space, and
consciousness.
Kukai’s view of the
universe is that the six
elements are its essence
and are identical with
the Dharmakaya Buddha
Mahavairocana.



(2) Contextualizing Savitri : Sutra, Mantra, and Tantra

In all of these comparative studies, we realize that there are identities and differences that together constitute the reality of the things. And when we speak about *sutra* and *tantra* and the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, we won't see that these things are all the same. And we won't see that they are all different. We will see that there are identities and differences which constitute their essential nature. If we don't recognize that, then we won't really know what any of them are. This is a contribution of the French school of philosophy known as deconstruction, which is based on fundamental Hegelian concepts, and Sri Aurobindo certainly recognized the validity of that methodology and applied it himself early on, as did Heidegger, at about the same time in fact – the former in his interpretations of the ancient Sanskrit and the latter in his interpretations of the ancient Greek wisdom.

So, when we look at *The Future Poetry* originally written in 1920, and a supplement to that text that Sri Aurobindo wrote in the 'Forties' titled *On Quantitative Meter*, – which are not so much about the future poetry in fact but all about *mantra*, – we find definitions of *mantra* throughout these works, which have been combined in a recent edition of *The Future Poetry* (1997). There are references to English poetics and prosody in this book, and people find it easy to categorize the work as such and put it on the shelf, because when they try to read it they realize that they don't understand what he is talking about. This is therefore not a very much read or understood work of Sri Aurobindo, just as *Savitri* is not widely read or understood, because this is *tantric* teaching.

We know that in both Hinduism and Buddhism it is common to be on the path of *sutra* teachings for a considerable period of time before being ready to enter into the *tantric* teachings. Anyone who has studied a school of Yoga in Hinduism or Buddhism has probably realized something like that; there is a secret teaching that depends on transmission usually by the *guru* through *mantra*, which is essential, but it usually doesn't happen at the beginning of the practice. It is

understood that first the individual needs to work on purification and to discover the difference between Purusha (Self) and Prakriti (Nature-force), in order to achieve a certain degree of liberation of the Self, and then it is possible to receive the *yoga mantra* transmission.

Sri Aurobindo defines *mantra* like this: "The Mantra is a direct and most heightened, and intensest, and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things" (1997, p. 218). And further, in order to qualify the special energy that such expression requires, and to distinguish it from what we normally consider poetry to be, he says: "The Mantra, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought substance, style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. ...But it is only at a certain highest level of the fused intensities that the Mantra becomes possible" (1997, p.19).

The 'things' that *mantras* speak about, by the way, are not the everyday things that the mind is most familiar with. When he says that the inmost reality of things is transmitted in a most vivid and real way, he is speaking about things that we would normally not know anything about. This is a fact of *tantric* spirituality which is understood in all of the traditions. You cannot access the content of that consciousness without a direct transmission by someone who dwells in that spiritual consciousness. The human being who dwells in the Overmind consciousness has a view and an energy that is the essence of the transmission. It's that view and that energy that is received. This idea of *mantra* is not an abstract concept. It is a certain energy of consciousness that we are capable of realizing but it is not by any means easy to generate. Only someone who has practiced for a long time and achieved that realization, or *siddhi*, really knows anything about it.

Nowadays, a lot of things are being published in the Tibetan Buddhist

tradition, secret teachings that are being translated and commented on, quite plentifully, which is quite different from when I was a student back in the 'Sixties'. Then there were only the few texts by Evans-Wentz. For example, now you can get the *Kalachakra Tantra* (1999), and *The Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra* (1997) by the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, and other texts such as this *Vajrayogini Tantra* by Geshe Kalsang Gyatso (1991), which is a secret Vajrayana teaching, in which you will find hundreds of pages of *mantras* in Sanskrit and English. In the Vajrayogini *tantra*, you will read: "Om namo bhagavate vajra varahi bam, hum, hum, phat." Now, *Bhagavate vajra varahi* can also be read in Hindu *tantra*. Varahi is a mother goddess and there are many temples in India from around the 9th Century with the goddess/statue of the Divine Mother who has the head of a boar with tusks. In south Indian Hindu *tantra*, and in Kashmiri Hindu *tantra*, and in Tibetan Buddhist *tantra*, she is the Divine Mother, she is the Shakti, and she has many names. Another *mantra* in this tradition, and there are many that we may recognize as being related to the Vedic deities, says: *Om agniye ahdiba ahdiba ambisha ambisha maha shriye ...om ah hum*.

Om agniye, O fire... This is the phrase with which the 'hymns to the mystic fire' often begin, of which hundreds were translated by Sri Aurobindo from the Rg Veda, which became the foundation of his Yoga, his cosmology, and his psychology of spiritual transformation. And *mahashriye* is of course none other than Mahalakshmi, Sri Shakti of the south Indian *Lakshmi Tantra*. These are the deities, the principles, the powers and qualities of existence, that Sri Aurobindo has written thousands of lines of *mantric* English poetry to convey to us, of which we would otherwise probably never become directly aware unless we seriously followed the teachings of one of these *tantric* traditions.

Now if we don't read the Vedic *mantras* translated by Sri Aurobindo in a spirit of sacrifice, of offering ourselves to the flame of purification, to the gods, then we aren't likely to hear anything meaningful in them. The form of that early Sanskrit is hardly understood by anyone today, in the first place, and it is extremely mystical. Similarly, these Tibetanized Sanskrit *mantras* and translations quoted above can be somehow

understood in the context of Sri Aurobindo's translations and commentaries of *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, but otherwise you would need to have a substantial practice on the visualizations, symbols, and texts with a Lama, before you would experience the fruition of these teachings, especially since we don't know the Sanskrit and Tibetan language, and the translations of course aren't *mantric*. And yet these teachings are given to anyone who wants them by many Lamas. For example, let us read a translation of the *Om agniye mantra* above: "O deity who eats what is burned in the fire/ King of Rishis and Lord of the spirits/ together with the hosts of fire deities from the southeast/ to you I make offerings, praises, and prostrations/ please enjoy this sacrifice that I offer you!" We can read the same thing, or something quite similar, in Sri Aurobindo's translations of the Rg Veda, but he has done something unique. He is a *mantra guru* who had the gift of transmitting *mantric* teachings in English. And this is extraordinary. For example, let us listen to a few verses of this hymn, rendered in that highest intensity of rhythmic speech that he said characterizes *mantra*:

O Fire, thou art set here in all as the Priest of the call in the sacrifice; set by the gods in the human being.

Offer worship with thy rapturous tongues in the rite of the Path to the great Ones. Bring the gods to us, do them sacrifice.

O ordainer of works, mighty of will, by thy revealing light in the sacrifice thou knowest the tracks of the gods and their highways.

Now has the Bringer of the Treasure with his horses of swiftness aspired to thee for a twofold bliss; he has sacrificed in the sacrifices to the king of sacrifice.

O Fire, for the Servant of Heaven who presses the wine, for Bharadwaja the giver of the offering, the multitude of these desirable things!

Thou art the Immortal messenger; lend ear to the laud of the seer and bring the Divine People.

Men deeply meditating aspire to thee that the godheads may come to them; mortals they aspire to the god in the sacrifice.

Bring into sacrifice thy perfect sight and thy will; rich are thy gifts
and in thee is the joy of all who desire.

Thou art the Priest of the call set here in thinking man, his carrier
with mouth of flame wiser in knowledge than he. O Fire, sacrifice
to the people of heaven.

Come, O Fire, for the advent; voiced by the word, come for the
gift of the oblation: sit, the Priest of our invocation, on the grass of
the altar.

O Angiras, we make thee to grow by our fuel and our offering of
the clarity; flame into a vast light, O ever-youthful Fire.

O God, O Fire, thou illumineest towards us a wide light of inspired
knowledge and the vastness of a perfect force. ...

(Rg Veda, Mandala Six, Sukta 16, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, p. 276-
278)

At some point he stopped translating and commenting on the scriptures
and concentrated on transmitting the spiritual knowledge in English.
Most of his written works are not translations and commentaries; they
are original yogic formulations from that consciousness which is the
goal, and they have the power to illumine. The conventional meaning of
mantra is 'word of power'. And as I often point out, Sri Aurobindo's
writings are sound-based; he is writing as if he were speaking, or
chanting, and he is conveying a knowledge that was originally the
product of an oral tradition. Savitri, in the Veda, is a goddess of illumined
speech, and Surya Savitri is the truth-force and truth-consciousness that
creates the planes of this lower world of mind, life, and body through
the inspired Word.

The definition of *mantra* that I read from Sri Aurobindo above, is difficult
for anyone to understand, and maybe most difficult for people who are
working in the Sanskrit tradition. If you are working in that tradition you
are probably not going to think that *mantra* is this. (This is in fact a
subject of on-going research and debate in our institution, concerning
Vedic speech and Sanskrit.) Sri Aurobindo explains that if the word is

mantra, you will see the reality at the same time that, or within a short time after, you hear it. It is not an intellectual content for the mind. He also says, in a longer explanatory comment on language and meaning, "The words which we use in our speech seem to be, if we look only at their external formation, mere physical sounds which a device of the mind has made to represent certain objects and ideas and perceptions, (i.e. the *representational* use of language) – a machinery nervous perhaps in origin, but developed for a constantly finer and more intricate use by the growing intelligence; but if we look at them (ie. words, language) in their inmost psychological and not solely at their more external aspect, we shall see that what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance is a subtle conscious force which informs and is the soul of the body of sound: it is a superconscious Nature-force raising its material out of our subconsciousness but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is this force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative speech."

Surya Savitri. Ishwara Shakti. Surya (Lord of Light) represents Ishwara (Supreme Self), and Savitri (Creative Word) represents Shakti (Divine Force). The original creative power of idea, truth, force, form, and eventually body, life, and mind that are created in the descent from that highest plane of Consciousness-force (which is present in this room although we are normally not aware of it) becomes evolutionary form and process in time and space. This is Sri Aurobindo's cosmology. Creation is a process of descent from the timeless, infinite energy of Being, and its evolutionary becoming in forms in time and space. And this is also the process of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo teaches that in spiritual development, it is not just a process from below upward but there is also a corresponding descent from above which responds to the fire of Agni that is generated from below. The idea of *pashyanti vak* is the idea of the creative word in Vedic Sanskrit. And it was Sri Aurobindo's endeavor to create a language that can transmit truths from this plane of consciousness and force above mind, which is not familiar to the

ordinary practical and logical mind, and which he called Overmind. One of the basic techniques that he used for this purpose, as he explained in detail in *The Future Poetry*, is quantitative meter, which allows the poet to achieve those highest intensities of language that we heard about earlier.

The biggest mistake that people make in reading *Savitri* is to read it silently and try to understand it, which we do because of the mental habit of reading with the eye and making mental associations in order to understand something, which is a method we have learned over a few hundred years of intellectual conditioning. But Sri Aurobindo has explained that each metric unit of a line of *mantric* poetry has sound-weight, and the weight carries the meaning of the phrase. But we can only perceive this through hearing the phrases which carry the meaning rhythmically to the hearer. As he says, “the eye can’t get it”. If that meaning is spiritual and is conveyed through hundreds of lines, which are designed to convey certain truths and experiences rhythmically through sound units that carry optimal meaning, when we understand it, it is because we have heard it, and not because we have thought about it and figured it out. The technique that we have learned for reading and understanding text is not going to work with *Savitri*.

So let us look for a moment at this rhythmic structure of *Savitri*. It has been called iambic pentameter but it could as well be called anapestic or dactylic pentameter, but even this does not describe the metric structure. And he has explained that if we scan the lines for these traditional structures we will miss the actual rhythm. Each line is generally either three or four quantitative feet long. For example, listen to these four lines:

A leisure/ in the labour/ of the worlds/
A pause/ in the joy/ and anguish/ of the search/
Restored/ the stress/ of Nature/ to God’s calm/,
A vast/ unanimity/ ended life’s debate/.

We can hear the weight in each of the metric units of each of these lines

which carries the meaning, and we can hear that the units in each line follow the pattern 3/4/4/3. And we can notice here, and in many instances on every page, that a phrase like 'ended life's debate' is a single unit because of the meaning as well as the sound weight: it is life's debate that is ended; these terms cannot be separated if we are to understand their meaning. These lines are from Book One, Canto Three, p. 32, which is a section on the realization of the traditional goal of *sutra yoga*, the detachment and liberation of Purusha from Prakriti. When we hear them in the context of the whole section they will have another *dynamis*, which we will notice in a striking way. And this will also demonstrate how a section of a Canto, which is clearly demarcated by Sri Aurobindo, is the complete and concentrated transmission of a theme or principle or experience and can be taken as such, with a completeness and totality in itself that is not dependent on the whole Canto or Book for its meaning and power. The section is the *mantra*.

In the field of Hindu and Buddhist Yoga it is widely recognized that there is a methodology which comes down to two streams of practice: *sutra* and *tantra*. We are probably familiar with the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (see for example the recent, excellent translations and commentaries by Edwin Bryant, 2009). And if we read Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*, we will find that he has incorporated quite thoroughly the *yoga sutra* teachings of Patanjali, or Raja Yoga. For example, in the fourth part of the *Synthesis* there are the teachings about *samata*, *mukti*, *samyama*, *samadhi*, purification, meditation, renunciation, surrender, liberation, etc. which are common terms in *yoga sutra* teachings. And only toward the end of the book does he speak about the essential role of Shakti in the transformation of mind, life, and body. But then, after writing the *Synthesis*, he writes *Savitri* for twenty-five years, and it is very different. It is a continuous invocation of the divine Shakti.

If we look into some of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, for example the writings of Lama Yeshe, who established centers and taught in the USA in the 'Eighties', or the works by the Dalai Lama cited above, we get a clear definition of the differences and relations between *sutra* and *tantra*. A characteristic summary of these terms has been given by Lama

Yeshe, who writes in his *Introduction to Tantra, The Transformation of Desire* (1987),

Before we can board the lightning vehicle of Tantra, we have to understand why it is both necessary and possible to abandon our ordinary limited view of ourselves and to generate in its place the enlightened self identity of a fully evolved being. ...By generating the prerequisite renunciation, *bodhichitta* and wisdom, and by delving into the clear nature of our mind, we create the space in which true self transformation can take place. Yet it is not enough merely to know why such transformation is necessary and possible. We must also generate the strength and confidence that will enable us to follow this radical approach to fulfillment" (p.83).

The processes of silencing and emptying the thought mind and vital impulses through meditation that are mentioned here have the same focus, objectives, and practices as Raja Yoga. And to answer the question as to why it is necessary to do this, which is always a fundamental task of *sutra*, we may recall Sri Aurobindo's definition of the "two liberations" in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1970 ed.), which also indicates the subsequent or complementary movement of *tantra*:

This inferior action of Nature in which we live has certain essential qualitative modes which constitute the whole basis of its inferiority. The constant effect of these modes on the soul in its natural powers of mind, life and body is a discordant and divided experience, a strife of opposites, *dwandwa*, a motion in all its experience and an oscillation between or a mixture of constant pairs of contraries, of combining positives and negatives, dualities. A complete liberation from the ego and will of desire must bring with it a superiority to the qualitative modes of the inferior Nature, *traigunyatitya*, a release from this mixed and discordant experience, a cessation or solution of the dual action of Nature. ...A liberation from Nature in a quiescent bliss of the spirit is the first form of release. A farther liberation of the Nature into divine quality and spiritual power of world-experience fills the supreme calm with the supreme kinetic bliss of knowledge, power, joy, and mastery. A divine unity of supreme spirit and its supreme nature is the integral liberation. (1970, p. 655-656)

The first necessity is some fundamental poise of the soul both in its

essential nature and its natural being regarding and meeting the things, impacts and workings of Nature. This poise we shall arrive at by growing into a perfect equality, *samata*. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated; for it is the sign of our having passed beyond the egoistic determinations of our nature, of our having conquered our enslaved response to the dualities, of our having transcended the shifting turmoil of the *gunas*, of our having entered into the calm and peace of liberation ...To divinize the perfected nature, we have to call in the divine Power, or *Shakti*, to replace our limited human energy so that this may be shaped into the image of and filled with the force of greater infinite energy, *daivi prakriti, bhagavat shakti/* (1970, p. 655-666)

Now we could as well present many pages of text from Tibetan *sutra* teachings as well as from the Raja Yoga *sutras* to demonstrate how identical these sayings of Sri Aurobindo are to the general content and style of what is known traditionally as *yoga sutra*. But what characterizes the essential teaching of the schools of *tantra* may be compressed briefly into three terms: *guru yoga, mantra, and shakti*. The Vajrayana school of Tibetan Buddhism has preserved this tradition for a thousand years since it first migrated from the Hindu schools of *tantra* such as Sri Vidya and the Swatantra Trika into Tibet. And it is because this teaching has been re-energized and given such extreme importance by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* that we must recognize it as a fundamental branch of his synthesis of Yoga, and as the primary importance of his extraordinary poetic creation.

The most striking examples of this meaning and power of *Savitri* may be found at the beginning of the book, in Cantos Three and Five of Book One. Canto Three is a full exposition of the Raja Yogi's experience of the liberation of Purusha, and Canto Five is a full exposition of the Raja Yogi's union with the Divine Mother, and the descent and transformation of his mind, life, and body by the Divine Shakti. The liberation of Purusha, the identification with the Absolute, and the descent of the divine Shakti are repeated in numerous Cantos throughout *Savitri* in such a prominent way that this may be recognized as the fundamental intention of the *mantra guru*: to make this teaching, invocation, and transmission possible to those who approach it as his, Sri

Aurobindo's, *mantra* of spiritual transformation. It is these Cantos and incantations of power that make possible a vivid perception of the meaning of liberation, and that bring into the concrete experiential range of the hearer and seer of this embodiment of conscious-force, not a concept but the actual energy of transformation. If these lines are expressed with that highest three-fold intensity that the *mantra* requires, then the hearer is united with the *guru*, with the *mantra*, and with the Goddess-energy, each of which is united in the embodiment of force whose name is Savitri.

This is the traditional structure of *tantra* in fact. As explained by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of *guru yoga*, the devotee visualizes the deity, the Lama as a vessel of the deity, and the *mantra* mediates the union of the three. Another fundamental structure of *tantra* is that its goal is liberation and transformation through the death experience, which of course is the ultimate theme of *Savitri*. As explained by Lama Yeshe: "The sutra and tantra teaching diagnose the problems of cyclic existence in different ways, and also offer different solutions to these problems. According to sutra, the root of samsaric suffering is ego-grasping: the wrong view that holds onto a mistaken belief in a self-existent "I", or ego-identity. The antidote for this ignorant conception is found by cultivating a completely opposite view. Instead of ignorantly assenting to our instinctive belief in self-existence, we are taught how to generate an insight into emptiness (in Raja Yoga the liberation of Purusha, *mukti*): the total negation of all notions of independent self-existence. ...While the lightning path of tantra does not deny what sutra has to say, it offers a different, more radical approach to the problems of our life. According to these more advanced teachings, all difficulties are rooted in our ordinary uncontrolled experiences of death and what happens after death. ...The cure for such uncontrollably recurring confusion is a type of meditation in which we transform our ordinary experiences of death, bardo, and rebirth into the enlightened experience of a Buddha. The tantric antidote, therefore, is not something that is the opposite of the problem – the way that the wisdom of emptiness is the opposite of the ignorance of ego-grasping – but rather something that is similar to it. ...

This ordinary rebirth experience can be transformed by the skilled practitioner in the same way that death and bardo were transformed. Instead of moving from the bardo to the next life under the force of insecurity and grasping, ignorantly falling into unconsciousness, the well-trained followers of tantra can choose their rebirth consciously" (1987, p. 103-104,113).

This of course is precisely what happens in the last major section and ultimate thematic teaching of *Savitri* when the goddess who unites with the mortal soul, consciously passes through death in order to make the transformation of death possible. And this theme of sacrifice for the sake of humanity, which recurs periodically in *Savitri* with great force, is another typical aspect of the structure of *tantra*. As stated emphatically by the Lama, "...there is absolutely no way for us to reap the immeasurable benefits of tantra if our motivation is centered on our own welfare alone. The only type of person for whom tantra can work is someone who is primarily concerned with benefitting others and sees the tantric path as the quickest and most powerful way of accomplishing this altruistic aim" (1987, p. 14). To conquer death and win immortality, and thereby to gain the leverage necessary to bring about an evolutionary leap in the destiny of the human being, is the motive force and aim of the personified yogic consciousness in *Savitri*. And it is this mythological and spiritual purpose of existence itself, as stated in another, south Indian, tantric tradition, that of Narayana and Narayani in the *Lakshmi Tantra*, that is recalled in these powerful lines of *Savitri* that convey the trance-vision of cosmic purpose:

A glimpse was caught of things for ever unknown:
The letters stood out of the unmoving Word:
In the immutable nameless Origin
Was seen emerging as from fathomless seas
The trail of the Ideas that made the world,
And, sown in the black earth of Nature's trance,
The seed of the Spirit's blind and huge desire
From which the tree of cosmos was conceived
And spread its magic arms through a dream of space.

Immense realities took on a shape:
There looked out from the shadow of the Unknown
The bodiless Namelessness that saw God born
And tries to gain from the mortal's mind and soul
A deathless body and a divine name. (*Savitri*, I.III.40)

In addition to the context of Sutra, Mantra, and Tantra, which I believe can make this work of Sri Aurobindo more accessible to readers with respect to his actual intention, it is equally important to emphasize the allegorical context. Allegorical interpretation originated with the Catholic theologian Origenos, who was a contemporary of St. Augustine, and they both studied under the great mystic Plotinus. According to this school of literary and scriptural interpretation, the sacred or inspired text has to be understood as conveying a veiled meaning that is revealed by the inner understanding and identification of the reader with the symbols and language through which it is conveyed. A textbook definition of allegory says that allegory is a hermeneutic of how our minds extract the true meaning in a symbolic story, and the allegorical mode is defined as controlled indirectness and double meaning. But it is more than this. When the allegory is conveyed with *mantric* force, it is a direct transmission of the mystery, and therefore we don't need to perform an intellectual exercise of interpretation. We see and hear the difference and the sameness, the Word and the Truth. We separate the mystery from the narrative by an act of identification with the substance and meaning that are conveyed to us directly. But what is true here, as in allegory in general, is that the literary form arouses a response to different levels of meaning, and through this aroused awareness cultural and spiritual values are imparted and affirmed. Thus, the allegorical level of literary creation is said to impart the values of an elite which thereby ensures the continuation of the highest aims of humanity and culture. When Savitri, the goddess of illumined speech, descends and unites with the mortal, we feel the descent and are united and energized by its word of power, to rise to the heights of spiritual realization and the possibilities of a divine transformation of life and death.

Finally, let us try to hear and see the *mantras* of descent, liberation, and

the cosmic duality of Purusha and Prakriti, the Sanatana Dharma.

The Mantra of the descent of the Divine Shakti

In a divine retreat from mortal thought,
In a prodigious gesture of soul-sight,
His being towered into pathless heights,
Naked of its vesture of humanity.
As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:
His nature shuddered in the Unknown's grasp.
In a moment shorter than death, longer than Time,
By a Power more ruthless than Love, happier than Heaven,
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force
Hurried into unimaginable depths,
Upborne into immeasurable heights,
It was torn out from its mortality
And underwent a new and bourneless change.
An Omniscient knowing without sight or thought,
An indecipherable Omnipotence,
A mystic Form that could contain the worlds,
Yet make one human breast its passionate shrine,
Drew him out of his seeking loneliness
Into the magnitudes of God's embrace.
As when a timeless Eye annuls the hours
Abolishing the agent and the act,
So now his spirit shone out wide, blank, pure:
His wakened mind became an empty slate
On which the Universal and Sole could write.

All that represses our fallen consciousness
Was taken from him like a forgotten load:
A fire that seemed the body of a god
Consumed the limiting figures of the past
And made large room for a new self to live.
Eternity's contact broke the moulds of sense.
A greater Force than the earthly held his limbs,
Huge workings bared his undiscovered sheaths,
Strange energies wrought and screened tremendous hands
Unwound the triple cord of mind and freed
The heavenly wideness of a Godhead's gaze.
As through a dress the wearer's shape is seen,
There reached through forms to the hidden absolute
A cosmic feeling and transcendent sight.
Increased and heightened were the instruments.
Illusion lost her aggrandising lens;
As from her failing hand the measures fell,
Atomic looked the things that loomed so large.
The little ego's ring could join no more;
In the enormous spaces of the self
The body now seemed only a wandering shell,
His mind the many-frescoed outer court
Of an imperishable Inhabitant:
His spirit breathed a superhuman air.
The imprisoned deity rent its magic fence.
As with a sound of thunder and of seas,
Vast barriers crashed around the huge escape.
Immutably coeval with the world,
Circle and end of every hope and toil
Inexorably drawn round thought and act,
The fixed immovable peripheries
Effaced themselves beneath the Incarnate's tread.
The dire velamen and the bottomless crypt
Between which life and thought for ever move,
Forbidden still to cross the dim dread bounds,

The guardian darkneses mute and formidable,
Empowered to circumscribe the wingless spirit
In the boundaries of Mind and Ignorance,
Protecting no more a dual eternity
Vanished rescinding their enormous role:
Once figure of creation's vain ellipse,
The expanding zero lost its giant curve.
The old adamantine vetoes stood no more:
Overpowered were earth and Nature's obsolete rule;
The python coils of the restricting Law
Could not restrain the swift arisen God:
Abolished were the scripts of destiny.
There was no small death-hunted creature more,
No fragile form of being to preserve
From an all-swallowing Immensity.
The great hammer-beats of a pent-up world-heart
Burst open the narrow dams that keep us safe
Against the forces of the universe.
The soul and cosmos faced as equal powers.
A boundless being in a measureless Time
Invaded Nature with the infinite;
He saw unpathed, unwalled, his titan scope. (*Savitri*, I.V.80-3)

The Mantra of Liberation

Ever his consciousness and vision grew;
They took an ampler sweep, a loftier flight;
He passed the border marked for Matter's rule
And passed the zone where thought replaces life.
Out of this world of signs suddenly he came
Into a silent self where world was not
And looked beyond into a nameless vast.
These symbol figures lost their right to live,
All tokens dropped our sense can recognise;
There the heart beat no more at body's touch,

There the eyes gazed no more on beauty's shape.
In rare and lucent intervals of hush
Into a signless region he could soar
Packed with the deep contents of formlessness
Where world was into a single being rapt
And all was known by the light of identity
And Spirit was its own self-evidence.
The Supreme's gaze looked out through human eyes
And saw all things and creatures as itself
And knew all thought and word as its own voice.
There unity is too close for search and clasp
And love is a yearning of the One for the One,
And beauty is a sweet difference of the Same
And oneness is the soul of multitude.
There all the truths unite in a single Truth,
And all ideas rejoin Reality.
There knowing herself by her own termless self,
Wisdom supernal, wordless, absolute
Sat unaccompanied in the eternal Calm,
All-seeing, motionless, sovereign and alone.
There knowledge needs not words to embody Idea;
Idea, seeking a house in boundlessness,
Weary of its homeless immortality,
Asks not in thought's carved brilliant cell to rest
Whose single window's clipped outlook on things
Sees only a little arc of God's vast sky.
The boundless with the boundless there consorts;
While there, one can be wider than the world;
While there, one is one's own infinity.
His centre was no more in earthly mind;
A power of seeing silence filled his limbs:
Caught by a voiceless white epiphany
Into a vision that surpasses forms,
Into a living that surpasses life,
He neared the still consciousness sustaining all.

The voice that only by speech can move the mind
Became a silent knowledge in the soul;
The strength that only in action feels its truth
Was lodged now in a mute omnipotent peace.
A leisure in the labour of the worlds,
A pause in the joy and anguish of the search
Restored the stress of Nature to God's calm.
A vast unanimity ended life's debate.
The war of thoughts that fathers the universe,
The clash of forces struggling to prevail
In the tremendous shock that lights a star
As in the building of a grain of dust,
The grooves that turn their dumb ellipse in space
Ploughed by the seeking of the world's desire,
The long regurgitations of Time's flood,
The torment edging the dire force of lust
That wakes kinetic in earth's dullard slime
And carves a personality out of mud,
The sorrow by which Nature's hunger is fed,
The oestrus which creates with fire of pain,
The fate that punishes virtue with defeat,
The tragedy that destroys long happiness,
The weeping of Love, the quarrel of the Gods,
Ceased in a truth which lives in its own light.
His soul stood free, a witness and a king.
Absorbed no more in the moment-ridden flux
Where mind incessantly drifts as on a raft
Hurried from phenomenon to phenomenon,
He abode at rest in indivisible Time.
As if a story long written but acted now,
In his present he held his future and his past,
Felt in the seconds the uncounted years
And saw the hours like dots upon a page.
An aspect of the unknown Reality
Altered the meaning of the cosmic scene.

A small result of a stupendous force:
Overtaking the moment the eternal Ray
Illumined That which never yet was made.
Thought lay down in a mighty voicelessness;
The toiling Thinker widened and grew still,
Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart:
His soul could sail beyond thought's luminous bar;
Mind screened no more the shoreless infinite.
Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars
The superconscient realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.
There came not form or any mounting voice;
There only were Silence and the Absolute.
Out of that stillness mind new-born arose
And woke to truths once inexpressible,
And forms appeared, dumbly significant,
A seeing thought, a self-revealing voice.
He knew the source from which his spirit came:
Movement was married to the immobile Vast;
He plunged his roots into the Infinite,
He based his life upon eternity. (*Savitri*, I.III.31-4)

The Mantra of Purusha and Prakriti

All here where each thing seems its lonely self
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:
Only by him they are, his breath is their life;
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.
A playmate in the mighty Mother's game,
One came upon the dubious whirling globe
To hide from her pursuit in force and form.
A secret spirit in the Inconscient's sleep,
A shapeless Energy, a voiceless Word,

He was here before the elements could emerge,
Before there was light of mind or life could breathe.
Accomplice of her cosmic huge pretence,
His semblances he turns to real shapes
And makes the symbol equal with the truth:
He gives to his timeless thoughts a form in Time.
He is the substance, he the self of things;
She has forged from him her works of skill and might:
She wraps him in the magic of her moods
And makes of his myriad truths her countless dreams.
The Master of being has come down to her,
An immortal child born in the fugitive years.
In objects wrought, in the persons she conceives,
Dreaming she chases her idea of him,
And catches here a look and there a gest:
Ever he repeats in them his ceaseless births.
He is the Maker and the world he made,
He is the vision and he is the Seer;
He is himself the actor and the act,
He is himself the knower and the known,
He is himself the dreamer and the dream.
There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met
And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange;
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;
They are married secretly in our thought and life.
The universe is an endless masquerade:
For nothing here is utterly what it seems;
It is a dream-fact vision of a truth
Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,
A phenomenon stands out significant
Against dim backgrounds of eternity;
We accept its face and pass by all it means;
A part is seen, we take it for the whole.

Thus have they made their play with us for roles:
Author and actor with himself as scene,
He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.
Here on the earth where we must fill our parts,
We know not how shall run the drama's course;
Our uttered sentences veil in their thought.
Her mighty plan she holds back from our sight:
She has concealed her glory and her bliss
And disguised the Love and Wisdom in her heart;
Of all the marvel and beauty that are hers,
Only a darkened little we can feel.
He too wears a diminished godhead here;
He has forsaken his omnipotence,
His calm he has foregone and infinity.
He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;
To her he abandons all to make her great.
He hopes in her to find himself anew,
Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace
To her creative passion's ecstasy.
Although possessor of the earth and heavens,
He leaves to her the cosmic management
And watches all, the Witness of her scene.
A supernumerary on her stage,
He speaks no words or hides behind the wings.
He takes birth in her world, waits on her will,
Divines her enigmatic gesture's sense,
The fluctuating chance turns of her mood,
Works out her meanings she seems not to know
And serves her secret purpose in long Time.
As one too great for him he worships her;
He adores her as his regent of desire,
He yields to her as the mover of his will,
He burns the incense of his nights and days
Offering his life, a splendour of sacrifice.
A rapt solicitor for her love and grace,

His bliss in her to him is his whole world:
He grows through her in all his being's powers;
He reads by her God's hidden aim in things.
Or, a courtier in her countless retinue,
Content to be with her and feel her near
He makes the most of the little that she gives
And all she does drapes with his own delight.
A glance can make his whole day wonderful,
A word from her lips with happiness wings the hours.
He leans on her for all he does and is:
He builds on her largesses his proud fortunate days
And trails his peacock-plumaged joy of life
And suns in the glory of her passing smile.
In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;
He makes the hours pivot around her will,
Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:
This whole wide world is only he and she. (*Savitri*, I.IV.60-3)

(3) Exploring the Mahayana Tantric Teachings and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

Based on the text and commentary *Kalachakra Tantra* by the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (1985)

1. The Mantra Vehicle

In his introduction to the Kalachakra Tantra, the Dalai Lama makes a number of interesting remarks that correspond closely to our study presented last year on 'Sutra, Mantra, and Tantra', and also to this year's study of the 'Kena Upanishad and Savitri'. For example, let us recall a portion of the text of *Savitri* which outlines in symbolic form the two fundamental principles of Yoga, the identification and surrender of the inner being and the persistent flame of aspiration toward the absolute truth.

In an outburst of heavenly joy and ease
Life yields to the divinity within
And gives the rapture-offering of its all,
And the soul opens to felicity.
A bliss is felt that never can wholly cease,
A sudden mystery of secret Grace
Flowers goldening our earth of red desire.
All the high gods who hid their visages
From the soiled passionate ritual of our hopes,
Reveal their names and their undying powers.
A fiery stillness wakes the slumbering cells,
A passion of the flesh becoming spirit,
And marvellously is fulfilled at last
The miracle for which our life was made.
A flame in a white voiceless cupola
Is seen and faces of immortal light,
The radiant limbs that know not birth and death,
The breasts that suckle the first-born of the Sun,

The wings that crowd thought's ardent silences,
The eyes that look into spiritual Space.
Our hidden centres of celestial force
Open like flowers to a heavenly atmosphere;
Mind pauses thrilled with the supernal Ray,
And even this transient body then can feel
Ideal love and flawless happiness
And laughter of the heart's sweetness and delight
Freed from the rude and tragic hold of Time,
And beauty and the rhythmic feet of the hours.
This in high realms touches immortal kind;
What here is in the bud has blossomed there.
There is the secrecy of the House of Flame,
The blaze of godlike thought and golden bliss,
The rapt idealism of heavenly sense;
There are the wonderful voices, the sun-laugh,
A gurgling eddy in rivers of God's joy,
And the mystieried vineyards of the gold moon-wine,
All the fire and sweetness of which hardly here
A brilliant shadow visits mortal life. (*Savitri*, II.XII.278-9)

I wanted especially to draw our attention to this line of the passage, and those following it: "What here is in the bud has blossomed there" and to add to this image a similar passage from an earlier canto:

He sat in secret chambers looking out
Into the luminous countries of the unborn
Where all things dreamed by the mind are seen and true
And all that the life longs for is drawn close.
He saw the Perfect in their starry homes
Wearing the glory of a deathless form,
Lain in the arms of the Eternal's peace,
Rapt in the heart-beats of God-ecstasy. (*Savitri*, I.V.27-8)

If we are not familiar with the teachings of Tibetan Yoga and only know the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo we would probably never imagine how many similarities there are, of the type that I wish to present here. The Dalai

Lama explains, toward the end of his brief introduction to the Kalachakra Tantra that,

The Kalachakra Tantra has been intimately associated with the country of Shambala – its ninety-six districts, its kings, and retinue. Still, if you lay out a map and search for Shambala, it is not findable; rather, it seems to be a pure land which, except for those whose karma and merit have ripened, cannot be immediately seen or visited. As is the case, for example, with the Joyous Pure Land, Sky Territories, the Blissful Pure Land, Mount Da-la, and so forth, even though Shambala is an actual land – an actual pure land – it is not immediately approachable by ordinary persons such as by buying an airplane ticket. (p.166-167)

Although speaking with tongue in cheek here, as he often does, we are given an insight into a profound mystery of the tantric teaching with which Sri Aurobindo seems to be quite familiar. Moreover he has described the route for us and pointed out many landmarks for which we may wish to become clear-eyed scouts.

What is even more compelling in this introduction to Kalachakra Tantra is the distinction made between sutra and tantra, which reinforces the understanding that we gather also from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the importance given by him to the writing of *Savitri*, and its understanding as yoga mantra. Let me select just a few of the most pertinent sentences from the Dalai Lama's introduction, which seem to designate the path laid out in *Savitri* which we too wish to follow. Later these statements and concepts will be expanded and a close comparison made with the Yoga teaching in *Savitri*.

Concerning the Great Vehicle or Vehicle of Bodhisattvas itself, its sub-divisions – the Perfection Vehicle and the Mantra Vehicle – both require the motivational attitude of altruism and the practice of the six perfections, and both lead to the attainment of the fruit, which is unsurpassed enlightenment. Nevertheless, the two sub-divisions of the Great Vehicle – Sutra and Mantra – are posited as separate vehicles by way of the profundity of the means for attaining unsurpassed enlightenment; the two thereby differ in the body of the path for attaining the omniscience of Buddhahood. What is being explained here is the Mantra Vehicle. ...

The distinctive feature of the Secret Mantra Vehicle comes in terms of additional techniques for quickly developing the meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding and special insight – one-pointed meditative stabilization realizing emptiness. This is mainly achieved through deity yoga.

...the distinctive feature in terms of which the uncommon potency of the Highest Yoga Tantra path is developed, is in the explanation of practices for generating the fundamental innate mind of clear light as an entity of the path.

And why is the Perfection or Sutra Path less effective and the Highest Yoga Tantra or Mantra Path more effective in achieving these spiritual liberations? The answer is rather technical, and one might say almost scientific.

...in order to attain the Form Body of a Buddha it is necessary to have a substantial cause of a similar type for a Form Body; also, for the Truth Body it is necessary to have a substantial cause of a similar type. Since this is the case, our coarse body, which is a fruition of past karma, cannot serve as a substantial cause of similar type for a Buddha's Form Body. ...A Buddha's Body is one undifferentiable entity with that Buddha's mind; the form or body that is of one undifferentiable entity with a Buddha's subtle mind cannot be a coarse form. The Form Body that is of one undifferentiable entity with a Buddha's subtle mind is itself a very subtle entity, and thus as its substantial cause of similar type a body that has a very subtle nature must be achieved at the time of the path. ...Hence, a mode of achieving even the substantial cause of a Buddha's Form Body is not set forth in the three lower tantras (Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra) or in the Perfection Vehicle, and a mode of achieving the uncommon substantial cause of a Buddha's mind is also not set forth in the three lower tantras or in the Perfection Vehicle. ...the uncommon substantial cause must be the mind of clear light, and the three lower tantras and the Perfection Vehicle do not set forth a means of achieving the fundamental innate mind of clear light. ...therefore, without depending in general on Mantra and in particular on Highest Yoga Mantra, Buddhahood cannot be attained. (p. 164-165)

We can gather from this explanation that the power of mantra to

generate the innate mind of clear light is only possible when that mind has been attained (by the guru), and thus, through the generation and transmission of that mind, through the practice of Highest Yoga Mantra, its realization is made possible (by the ready practitioner), which is beyond the realizations of the six perfections and the realizations of the lower tantras of Action, Performance, and Yoga. Therefore it is said that the Mantra Vehicle is unsurpassed, uncommon, and essential for the highest realization of this spiritual path – “the state of union – a combination of empty form and immutable great bliss”.

From these few fragments, and without going into great detail about the systems of Yoga that have been mentioned, or the dogmas attached to them, it is already possible to derive a pattern that can be easily identified in *Savitri*. In Book 2, Canto 13, ‘In the Self of Mind’, we hear the essential teaching of liberation through absolute emptiness, and the achievement of what is known in Hindu yoga systems as the akshara purusha, as the mahayogi reaches this terminal point in his experiential journey, and the hearer is made to feel the substance of the experience, even if he has not entered into that field of experience by his own efforts:

AT LAST there came a bare indifferent sky
Where Silence listened to the cosmic Voice,
But answered nothing to a million calls;
The soul’s endless question met with no response.
An abrupt conclusion ended eager hopes,
A deep cessation in a mighty calm,
A finis-line on the last page of thought
And a margin and a blank of wordless peace.
There paused the climbing hierarchy of worlds.
He stood on a wide arc of summit Space
Alone with an enormous Self of Mind
Which held all life in a corner of its vasts.
Omnipotent, immobile and aloof,
In the world which sprang from it, it took no part:
It gave no heed to the paeans of victory,

It was indifferent to its own defeats,
It heard the cry of grief and made no sign;
Impartial fell its gaze on evil and good,
It saw destruction come and did not move.
An equal Cause of things, a lonely Seer
And Master of its multitude of forms,
It acted not but bore all thoughts and deeds,
The witness Lord of Nature's myriad acts
Consenting to the movements of her Force.
His mind reflected this vast quietism. (*Savitri*, II.XIII.283)

And there are many such episodes in *Savitri* because this is an essential, if not ultimate, status of consciousness in the development of the liberation stage of Yoga, and it recurs frequently, as if a lesson that cannot be overlooked or overpassed. For example, in Book 3, Canto 1:

The symbol modes of being helped no more,
The structures Nescience builds collapsing failed,
And even the spirit that holds the universe
Fainted in luminous insufficiency.
In an abysmal lapse of all things built
Transcending every perishable support
And joining at last its mighty origin,
The separate self must melt or be reborn
Into a Truth beyond the mind's appeal.
All glory of outline, sweetness of harmony,
Rejected like a grace of trivial notes,
Expunged from Being's silence nude, austere,
Died into a fine and blissful Nothingness. (*Savitri*, III.I.307)

And then, after each of these descents or ascents into emptiness, there follows the illumination, the equally empty and still but ecstatic and all-encompassing realization of the absolute truth, "the spontaneous arising of the clear light mind" that we hear about in the Dzogchen and Mahamudra systems of Tibetan Buddhism. And the one underlying mystery and unifying theme of these systems is the dual necessity of an absolute negation and emptiness prior to the illumination and

realization of transcendent bliss, as vividly and repeatedly presented in *Savitri*:

A light was round him wide and absolute,
A diamond purity of eternal sight;
A consciousness lay still, devoid of forms,
Free, wordless, uncoerced by sign or rule,
For ever content with only being and bliss;
A sheer existence lived in its own peace
On the single spirit's bare and infinite ground. ...

Thence gazing with an immeasurable outlook
One with self's inlook into its own pure vasts,
He saw the splendour of the spirit's realms,
The greatness and wonder of its boundless works,
The power and passion leaping from its calm,
The rapture of its movement and its rest,
And its fire-sweet miracle of transcendent life,
The million-pointing undivided grasp
Of its vision of one same stupendous All,
Its inexhaustible acts in a timeless Time,
A space that is its own infinity. ...(*Savitri*, II.XV.297-8)

Sight was a flame-throw from identity;
Life was a marvellous journey of the spirit,
Feeling a wave from the universal Bliss.
In the kingdom of the Spirit's power and light,
As if one who arrived out of infinity's womb
He came new-born, infant and limitless
And grew in the wisdom of the timeless Child;
He was a vast that soon became a Sun.
A great luminous silence whispered to his heart;
His knowledge an inview caught unfathomable,
An outview by no brief horizons cut:
He thought and felt in all, his gaze had power.
He communed with the Incommunicable;

Beings of a wider consciousness were his friends,
Forms of a larger subtler make drew near;
The Gods conversed with him behind Life's veil. (*Savitri*, II.XV.301)

In this context, let us also hear a translation of one of the Kalachakra Mantras in its approved translation by the Dalai Lama, first generating the aspirant's altruistic intention and then the field for the accumulation of merit, "the broad path of the immortal gods":

Lamas, Conquerors, and their Children,
Please take heed of me.
Just as the earlier Ones Gone to Bliss
Generated an altruistic intention
To become enlightened
And dwelt by stages in the learnings of Bodhisattvas,
So I also for the sake of helping transmigrators
Will generate an altruistic intention to become enlightened...
Now my life is fruitful.
I have attained a good human existence.
Today I have been born in the Buddha lineage
I have become a Buddha child...
Now whatever happens
I will act so as not to sully
This flawless holy Buddha lineage...

Within the great seal of clear light devoid of the elaborations of
inherent existence,
On the broad path of the immortal gods in front of myself
In the center of an ocean of offering clouds of Samantabhadra
Like five-colored rainbows thoroughly bedecked,
There is a jewel throne raised up by eight lions.
On it, on a pleasant lotus with a thousand open petals
Are discs of white moon, red sun, black rahu, and yellow kalagni
planets.
On them is my kind lama, composite in one
Of all the innumerable forms of refuge,

Undifferentiable from the Supramundane Victor,
The great Kalachakra,
Bearing the brilliance of sapphire and blazing with magnificence
With one face and two hands, holding vajra and bell,
To symbolize the uncommon path of the union of method and
wisdom,
He is in union with Vishvamata
Who has the color of camphor and holds curved knife and skull.
His outstretched red right leg and bent white left leg
Sport in dance on top of Mara and Rudra (symbols of the afflicted
emotions).

Respectful obeisance to the Lama of the Undifferentiable Three
Bodies,
The Body of Truth of great bliss primordially free from dualistic
elaborations,
The Body of complete enjoyment having the five features
Which are self-appearances of exalted wisdom,
And the dance of Emanation Bodies in oceans of the realms of
transmigrators.

2. The Ocean of Samantabhadra and the Role of Deity Yoga

To some extent we can understand and appreciate concepts like “a combination of empty form and immutable great bliss”, especially if we are practitioners who have spent many years on the Sutra Path and perhaps have heard and read and practiced the teachings of the lower tantras. But we must also admit that in our ordinary mind and life-bound existence, what these concepts really mean – what the reality beyond the symbol might actually be, is usually just a matter of speculation. And yet there are many mythologies and philosophies and psychologies that indicate the reality of such states and beings.

The most remarkable discovery is to find that there are traditions in both Hinduism and Buddhism, -which to some extent undoubtedly share a common origin,- tantric systems, that have created a form of

transmission known as mantra, whereby those realities can be revealed in a direct and powerful way, such that a seed of certitude is planted which makes the realization of such states of consciousness a natural, perhaps inevitable, outcome of these spiritual paths.

When we say “a natural outcome” it is in the sense of the Aristotelian concept of causality, whereby according to him everything in nature has a purpose, and causes have more or less predictable and appropriate results, although there can be accidents and errors and deficiencies. According to this concept of causality, the mantric transmission of the wisdom teaching of innate clear light mind would have the effect of generating that quality of mind in others. An “inevitable result,” however, implies a higher and more cosmic sense of causality, as if the result is destined in an essential way by the very nature of existence. In this sense, the mantra vehicle would be the product of an essentially compassionate universal mind (the Buddha’s true form) whose destiny is to liberate beings from illusion and suffering, and whose altruistic purpose is an inherent and innate potential of the human being who therefore enters upon this path for that purpose. This would account for and justify the universal requirement of an altruistic motivation of self-sacrifice for the well-being of others in tantric systems, and also for the high status given to the power of the mantra vehicle to achieve this aim. This most profound implication of cosmic purpose may be found in both the Kalachakra Tantra and other related texts, and in Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, which indicates that it is a fundamental belief and principle of tantric systems.

For example, in Canto 14 of Book 2 of *Savitri*, which lies between the two cantos cited above, Sri Aurobindo describes the bardo of death in terms that will be recognized by those who are familiar with either Hindu or Buddhist tantric systems, but this secret knowledge is also imparted with a revelatory power that informs and initiates the hearer regarding the purpose and destiny of human life. And there is clearly an inherent inevitability, and necessity, in this view of our purpose and destiny.

Immersed in voiceless internatal trance

The beings that once wore forms on earth sat there
In shining chambers of spiritual sleep.
Passed were the pillar-posts of birth and death,
Passed was their little scene of symbol deeds,
Passed were the heavens and hells of their long road;
They had returned into the world's deep soul.
All now was gathered into pregnant rest:
Person and nature suffered a slumber change.
In trance they gathered back their bygone selves,
In a background memory's foreseeing muse
Prophetic of new personality
Arranged the map of their coming destiny's course:
Heirs of their past, their future's discoverers,
Electors of their own self-chosen lot,
They waited for the adventure of new life.
A Person persistent through the lapse of worlds,
Although the same for ever in many shapes
By the outward mind unrecognisable,
Assuming names unknown in unknown climes
Imprints through Time upon the earth's worn page
A growing figure of its secret self,
And learns by experience what the spirit knew,
Till it can see its truth alive and God.

...

All that is made and once again unmade,
The calm persistent vision of the One
Inevitably re-makes, it lives anew:
Forces and lives and beings and ideas
Are taken into the stillness for a while;
There they remould their purpose and their drift,
Recast their nature and re-form their shape.
Ever they change and changing ever grow,
And passing through a fruitful stage of death
And after long reconstituting sleep
Resume their place in the process of the Gods

Until their work in cosmic Time is done. (*Savitri*, II.XIV. 293-4)

How and why these “words of power” work the way they do has been explained at length by another commentator on the Samantabhadra traditions of tantric Buddhist and Bon teachings, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche. In a very thorough and profound essay titled *Unbounded Wholeness* (2006), in which he conveys a logical and philosophical interpretation along with the original esoteric texts, he writes:

The power of essential precepts, the method for realizing wholeness, lies neither solely nor perhaps even primarily with their words but, rather, with their status as “an uninterrupted continuum of the word, that is, of essential precepts derived from experience of enlightened beings. ...This “uninterrupted continuum of the word” invokes the three kinds of transmission well known in Bon and Buddhist Dzogchen: the mind-to-mind transmission from Buddha mind itself; the condensation of this into more localized signs and symbols, which began the transmission through time and space (originary sound/speech); and the form in which humans can understand the teaching – namely the transmission of words (language) into the ears of listeners. ...These three are associated respectively, with the “flow of blessings” from unlocalized space of realization to esoterically charged symbols, to and through the words of human language. The point is that these are in continuity, that the essential precepts are present in every case, that scripture is therefore, in and of itself, authentic. (p. 163-164)

Through blessings of the Victor Samantabhadra bon-dimension, reflexive open awareness, a wholeness that is the heart essence of our ancestor is understood by the White Shen Diety, protector of beings. That itself, the very essence of mindheart understanding, dawns as open awareness in the mindheart. ...Lyrical speech, the musical expression of this open awareness, is addressed to fortunate ones, the heroically minded Bodhisattvas. ...Regarding this, the mindbase, the natural state of bon-phenomenon is like this: open awareness, the enlightenment mind, heart essence of all bon-phenomena of samsara and nirvana, is a self arisen mind, uncontrived and genuine. Untouched by either samsara or nirvana, its essential nature is uncoarsened by the five elements. Just that spontaneously occurring unbounded

wholeness is the key to the allbase, the primordial principle. (p. 224-225)

Nothing, not even one thing
Does not arise from me.
Nothing, not even one thing
Dwells not within me.
Everything, just everything
Emanates from me.
Thus am I only one.
Knowing me is knowing all –
Great bliss. (P. 229)

Finally, we may consider the remark made by the Dalai Lama, quoted above, which is made fully comprehensible by this commentary on Unbounded Wholeness. And it indicates both one of the most fundamental features of the Kalachakra Tantra, and one of the features by which this tradition can be most closely associated with Sri Aurobindo's teaching in *Savitri*. He said, "one-pointed meditative stabilization realizing emptiness... is mainly achieved through deity yoga". He explains this concept in detail right at the beginning of his commentary on this teaching. The students are prepared to enter the Mandala by right motivation, by altruism and wisdom, and a clear understanding of the purpose of the transmission. "Secret Mantra is a case of using imagination as the path; thus, one imagines that the entire world system appears in glorified aspect as the sport of the exalted wisdom of undifferentiable bliss and emptiness – a union of method and wisdom (the deity Samantabhadra). ...the area should be considered the complete inestimable mansion and environment of the Supramundane Victor, Kalachakra, having the very nature of exalted wisdom. Imagine that it is present in just the way that I am meditating on it and that you are in front of it. Imagine that the doors of the inestimable mansion are closed and that you are outside the doors, making offerings to the glorious Kalachakra..." (p. 169).

There follow innumerable mantras on initiation and fulfillment, which of course we need not try to encompass here. But, as we have been doing, we may cite a few passages that are especially pertinent to the power of

mantra itself, and to the idea of final realization or fruition of the practices in union with the deities of liberation and bliss. For example:

The Omniscient Ones arise
In the world rarely,
Only sometimes, like an udumvara flower,
And then do not appear.
The arising of the mode of Secret Mantra practice
Is even rarer than that.

Through it, the unequalled welfare of sentient beings
Can be accomplished without passing away.
Even ill deeds done earlier
Over ten millions of eons
Are all entirely removed
Immediately upon seeing such a mandala.

Thus what need is there to mention about dwelling
In the mode of Mantra practice endlessly renowned!
If one repeats protective secret mantra
One will achieve the unsurpassed state. (p. 199)

Having seen that all without exception of the supreme and
common feats
Follow after proper reliance on you, O Protector,
May I, disregarding even body and life,
Be blessed to achieve what is pleasing to you.

Through making such petitions, the lama comes to my crown
And dissolving into me becomes of one taste with me.
I am Vajrasattva, holding vajra and bell
And embracing the Female Supramundane Victor,
Sport with innate bliss. (p. 433)

There is perhaps not a better way to conclude these reflections and comparisons of tantric traditions, in many ways greatly different and yet in many ways the same, than with another passage from *Savitri* in which

it seems that Sri Aurobindo has revealed in an intense, uncommon, and unsurpassed form of mantric English, the stages of perfect purification and obeisance, the deities of power, protection, and transcendence, the all containing ocean of oneness in which all things arise, and the ultimate union of supplicant, deity, and immutable great bliss.

In a slumber of the voices of the world
He of the eternal moment grew aware;
His knowledge stripped bare of the garbs of sense
Knew by identity without thought or word;
His being saw itself without its veils,
Life's line fell from the spirit's infinity.
Along a road of pure interior light,
Alone between tremendous Presences,
Under the watching eyes of nameless Gods,
His soul passed on, a single conscious power,
Towards the end which ever begins again,
Approaching through a stillness dumb and calm
To the source of all things human and divine.
There he beheld in their mighty union's poise
The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,
A single being in two bodies clasped,
A diarchy of two united souls,
Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;
Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.
Behind them in a morning dusk One stood
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable.
Ever disguised she awaits the seeking spirit;
Watcher on the supreme unreachable peaks,
Guide of the traveller of the unseen paths,
She guards the austere approach to the Alone.
At the beginning of each far-spread plane
Pervading with her power the cosmic suns
She reigns, inspirer of its multiple works
And thinker of the symbol of its scene.

Above them all she stands supporting all,
The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask;
The ages are the footfalls of her tread,
Their happenings the figure of her thoughts,
And all creation is her endless act.
His spirit was made a vessel of her force;
Mute in the fathomless passion of his will
He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer.
Then in a sovereign answer to his heart
A gesture came as of worlds thrown away,
And from her raiment's lustrous mystery raised
One arm half-parted the eternal veil.
A light appeared still and imperishable.
Attracted to the large and luminous depths
Of the ravishing enigma of her eyes,
He saw the mystic outline of a face.
Overwhelmed by her implacable light and bliss,
An atom of her illimitable self
Mastered by the honey and lightning of her power,
Tossed towards the shores of her ocean-ecstasy,
Drunk with a deep golden spiritual wine,
He cast from the rent stillness of his soul
A cry of adoration and desire
And the surrender of his boundless mind
And the self-giving of his silent heart.
He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone. (*Savitri*, II.XIV.294-6)

3. The altruistic motivation: suffering and ignorance, compassion and sacrifice

In Sri Aurobindo's yogamantra teaching, we find, as a result rather than as a cause of the mahayogi's journey of renunciation, ascent, union with the Divine Mother, and the descent of her force in him, the compassionate turn toward the suffering world. In the second canto following the one just heard, we hear what may be understood to be the

culmination of the tantric path, and the fulfillment of the spiritual life: the absolute affirmation of the essential unity of formlessness and form; the absolute negation of ignorance and suffering and illusion; the absolute sacrifice of self for the well-being, liberation, and spiritual transformation of "all sentient beings".

The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak
Imaged itself in a surprising beam
And built a golden passage to his heart
Touching through him all longing sentient things. ...
A Life from beyond grew conqueror here of death;
To err no more was natural to mind;
Wrong could not come where all was light and love.
The Formless and the Formed were joined in her: ...
For one was there supreme behind the God.
A Mother Might brooded upon the world;
A Consciousness revealed its marvellous front
Transcending all that is, denying none:
Imperishable above our fallen heads
He felt a rapturous and unstumbling Force.
The undying Truth appeared, the enduring Power
Of all that here is made and then destroyed,
The Mother of all godheads and all strengths
Who, mediatrix, binds earth to the Supreme. ...
Illumined by her all-seeing identity
Knowledge and Ignorance could strive no more ...
All Nature dumbly calls to her alone
To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.
All here shall be one day her sweetness' home,
All contraries prepare her harmony;
Towards her our knowledge climbs, our passion gropes;
In her miraculous rapture we shall dwell,

Her clasp shall turn to ecstasy our pain.
Our self shall be one self with all through her. ...

His heart's demand had grown immeasurable:
His single freedom could not satisfy,
Her light, her bliss he asked for earth and men. (*Savitri*, III.II.312-5)

Perhaps it is due to ignorance and suffering that one is drawn to this path of great bliss, and perhaps it is because of the realization of the highest spiritual truths of existence that one is drawn to a life of sacrifice for the ultimate realization of others. But however this may be, and certainly the Indic traditions for thousands of years have been replete with great teachers, epics, philosophies, and spiritual doctrines that try to resolve the mystery, it is certain that the two extremes are inseparably connected, as cause to effect, or as beginning to end of a great timeless journey. Therefore it is easy now to look back at the beginning of the Dalai Lama's instructions to the students entering the Kalachakra Mandala, explaining and insisting on their mindfulness of the purpose, and to realize that this beginning is just as much a justification of the whole journey, as is its desired end.

With regard to wisdom, things appear as if independently existent but in reality do not exist that way; we should understand that things do not exist in accordance with their solid mode of appearance.

With regard to altruism, human society could not survive, could not exist without kindness. In the field of religious practice, the feeling of kindness is the key point.

It is very important to realize the nature of suffering. As long as we have this type of physical body under the influence of contaminated actions and afflictive emotions, something will be wrong...It is important to realize that the phenomena of cyclic existence have the nature of suffering.

Another important realization is that of impermanence. Things are always changing; this is their nature. With these thoughts in mind, we will proceed with this initiation. (p. 170-171)

And then, at the end of the long rite of initiation, including hundreds of mantras of instruction, purification, invocation, generation and

completion, the goal is reached, and there is the final glorious affirmation of victory.

Where else than in this profound path
Of divine guru yoga and the six session yoga
Is there the king of wish-granting jewels
Bestowing easily in one life
The vajra-body with an essence of emptiness and compassion! ...
May he who has the nature of appearing
As the one friend of all beings on the three levels,
Dance of compassion of the oceans of Conquerors pervading
space
Be firm in the sky of the mind of transmigrators
Subduing the darkness of troubles
Through the blazing warm rays of his activity! ...
Through this supremely superior good path
May beings equal in number to particles
Thoroughly conquer over the combat
Of the four types of defilements
And actualize in this lifetime the state of Kalachakra!... (p. 423)

It has been the purpose of this exposition simply to state the basic principles of highest yoga tantra, enhanced by the mantric transmissions of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*.⁵ Please accept this offering.

Aum Ah Hum

⁵We should note that, although Sri Aurobindo does not include or advocate in his Yoga any of the elaborate ritual practices for which the Tantric schools are known, he has stated the importance of the principles of Tantra in his major work *The Synthesis of Yoga*. For example, he writes: "In the method of synthesis which we have been following, another clue of principle has been pursued which is derived from another view of the possibilities of Yoga. This starts from the method of Vedanta to arrive at the aim of the Tantra. In the tantric method Shakti is all-important, becomes the key to the finding of the spirit; in this synthesis, spirit, soul is all-important, becomes the secret of the taking up of Shakti" (p. 585). This statement was, however, also made long before the writing of *Savitri*.

SAVITRI IMMERSION WORKSHOP

Crestone, Colorado
(Held Annually in August)

Schedule of Activities

1. Daily readings and meditations in **Savitri**:

This practice is based upon the Vedantic conception of *mantra* as the direct revelation of spiritual knowledge through sound, and upon the assumption that **Savitri**, in Sri Aurobindo's words, is the Force (*shakti*) of transformation in the Integral Yoga Sadhana.

***O Savitri, thou art my spirit's Power,
The revealing voice of my immortal Word,
The face of Truth upon the roads of Time
Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God.*** (*Savitri*, 11,1,
p.703)

2. Parallel reading from *Mother's Agenda*:

***Stability and change
Inertia and transformation
Eternity and progress***

Unity = power and repose Combined

3. Daily physical exercises, pranayama, balanced body movement and concentration; hikes along scenic mountain trails; creative dance.

4. Commentary-discussions: Examples – Jean Gebser and Sri Aurobindo, On the Evolution of Consciousness; Integral Transformative Practice (ITP) and Integral Yoga; Sutra, Mantra and Tantra in Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Yoga (varies annually).

5. Visits to the Haidakhandi Ashram and Temple, the Crestone Mountain

Zen Center, the Tashi Gomang Stupa, the Nada Carmelite Monastery, voluntary participation in their teachings/practices is optional.

Registration information:

Recommended Arrival and Departure: Announced on the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center website <http://www.sriurobindolc.org/>.

Fees: Full workshop, room and board and all activities – Five-day workshop \$450 individual room; \$375 shared room. Mineral Hot Springs bath and sauna, \$10 extra per visit. Minimum registration – \$150, covers two-day participation only.

Place: **Sri Aurobindo Learning Center**, 71724 Baca Grant Way, Crestone, CO for workshop activities and group living.

White Eagle Inn, on the Crestone Rd. near the golf course, approximately 10 miles east of Moffat from Highway 17 between Alamosa and Salida, CO, for private accommodations.

Information and registration, please contact Brian Dyer, email: briandyer@fairpoint.net

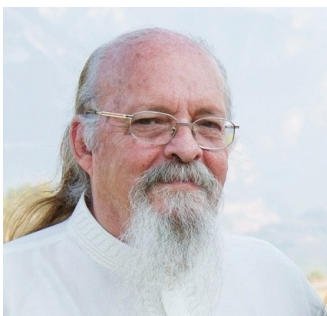
Phone: 719-256-6010, 719-256-4917

Note: Accommodation is limited. Please register by July 15th. A deposit of \$50 is required.

Savitri Solar Dome – 2003, 2012



About the Author



Rod Hemsell: Lecturer

Educator and author Rod Hemsell lived in Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1968-1983. He traveled extensively and spoke at centers and universities in India on Auroville and Sri Aurobindo's yoga philosophy, publishing a feature article on Auroville in the New Delhi Youth Times in 1974. He also published articles and essays in Mother India, World Union, and Auroville Review from 1970-1983.

In 1978, Rod presented Auroville along with Findhorn by Peter Caddy at the Festival for Mind, Body, and Spirit in London. Four years later, he gave a presentation on Savitri at Vishwabharati University in Santiniketan on the birthday of Rabindranath Tagore.

Rod was a guest speaker on Auroville at AUM in Boulder, Colorado in 1988, and in 1990 delivered lectures on Sri Aurobindo's yoga philosophy and Auroville at the California Institute for Integral Studies in San Francisco.

He founded the GAIA Learning Center in Crestone, Colorado in 1991. In 1993, he gave a lecture and presentation on Savitri and participated in a panel on Auroville at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago.

Rod has conducted annual Savitri Immersion workshops at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, Colorado, since 1994. He

founded the GLOBE Charter School in Colorado Springs, Colorado in 1995. In 2003, Rod published *Sri Aurobindo and the Logic of the Infinite: Essays for the new Millennium*. Other publications include *The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo – Mantra, Metrics and Meaning* (2009), and *The Philosophy of Evolution – Darwin and Sri Aurobindo* (2011).

From 2005 to 2013 Rod has lectured on philosophy and poetry at the University of Human Unity in Auroville, where he was also Principal of New Era Secondary School. During May-August 2013 he has presented a series of workshops on the Kena Upanishad and *Savitri* in the USA. Texts and audio recordings of these and other presentations are available at <http://universityofhumanunity.org/>