

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 57

*INVOCATION is a biannual publication of SAVITRI BHAVAN
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*This publication has been funded by SAIER
(Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research)*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Designed and Printed by Prisma, Auroville

April 2024

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The Grace and the help are always there for all who aspire for them and their power is limitless when received with faith and confidence.

– The Mother



Reflections on Passages in *Savitri*: What is Fate?

Larry Seidlitz

This presentation will consider Sri Aurobindo's views on the nature of Fate as revealed in a significant passage in *Savitri*, from the canto "The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain". It is a perplexing question that mankind has grappled with for thousands of years, an elusive and complex philosophical problem, which yet has crucial implications for our view of life and our navigation through the trials, tragedies and joys of life. Here Sri Aurobindo explicates the issues involved in this question of what fate is in subtle and revealing poetry. While reflecting on the significance of the mantric lines, the presentation will also draw on passages from other writings that help to draw out their implications.

The passage under consideration comes on pages 458-459 in the context of Savitri's return to the palace of her father King Aswapati and her mother the Queen, after meeting and choosing Satyavan as her spouse. Narad, the heavenly sage is there at the time, and after Savitri discloses her choice, reveals that Satyavan is destined to die in exactly one year. There then ensues a dialogue about fate and destiny, and the passage we will examine is a small but central and exalted part of Narad's explanation of this phenomenon that runs 56 lines. It can also be viewed as Sri Aurobindo's own viewpoint on the subject. I will break it into five segments commenting on each in turn. It begins:

Fate is Truth working out in Ignorance.
O King, thy fate is a transaction done
At every hour between Nature and thy soul
With God for its foreseeing arbiter.
Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny's book.

Man can accept his fate, he can refuse.
Even if the One maintains the unseen decree
He writes thy refusal in thy credit page:
For doom is not a close, a mystic seal.

It is a powerful statement, but complex and subtle in its thought. Let us begin with the first line: “Fate is Truth working out in Ignorance”. This seems to suggest, first, that there is such a thing as fate, a kind of predestined condition of things and course of events in the world. Second, it suggests that fate is a certain Truth of things that is gradually being revealed over time, or rather, “working out” over time, in or under the conditions of Ignorance. The distinction I am making between “revealed” and “working out” is meant to draw a line between the idea of “revealed”, which suggests that Truth is fixed or static and simply behind a curtain that is being removed, and the idea of “working out” which implies that Truth may be more malleable, plastic, or living, that it may be at least partially in the process of being formed in this Ignorance under its particular conditions, and that its unfolding is occurring within a play of forces favourable and unfavourable, “working out” rather than “revealed”. The term “in Ignorance” implies that we who live in this Ignorance and are undergoing this fate and its consequences can see neither the Truth that is gradually “working out” nor the course of its unfolding over time. Whereas there is or may be a state of Knowledge where these things are known, we are not in that state and therefore we feel we are being subjected to a process of unfolding that we can neither understand nor control. “Truth working out in Ignorance” also seems to suggest that this Ignorance in which things are “working out” is itself the Truth in an unfinished state of unfolding. This is a more profound idea which relates to the philosophical duality of Being and Becoming, a kind of static condition of Being, the Reality of what is, perhaps its essential Truth, and a dynamic, more outward and fluid condition of Becoming in which the Being is in a condition of becoming in space and time or realizing what it is in its essential Reality. Sri Aurobindo describes it this way:

The Absolute manifests itself in two terms, a Being and a Becoming. The Being is the fundamental reality; the Becoming is an effectual reality: it is a dynamic power and result, a

creative energy and working out of the Being, a constantly persistent yet mutable form, process, outcome of its immutable formless essence.... Becoming can only know itself wholly when it knows itself as Being; the soul in the Becoming arrives at self-knowledge and immortality when it knows the Supreme and Absolute and possesses the nature of the Infinite and Eternal. To do that is the supreme aim of our existence; for that is the truth of our being and must therefore be the inherent aim, the necessary outcome of our becoming... (CWSA 22: 685).

The next sentence consisting of three lines presents again a juxtaposition of two different statuses of Being and Becoming. To repeat the lines:

O King, thy fate is a transaction done
At every hour between Nature and thy soul
With God for its foreseeing arbiter.

It first describes a dynamic status of Becoming that is “working out” as a transaction at every hour between Nature and the soul, and then it describes an overseeing status of God who is the “foreseeing arbiter” of this transaction. An arbiter is like a judge, one who is empowered to decide matters of disagreement or dispute between two parties. But God is a “foreseeing” arbiter, which suggests he knows what is unfolding in the course of these transactions in the Becoming. In the dynamic status of Becoming, fate is stated to be a transaction that is going on at every hour between Nature and the soul. Here is another kind of duality in which the former duality, that of Being and Becoming, is kind of reproduced in the terms of the Becoming. Within the Becoming there is a soul, which represents the Being in the conditions of the Becoming. Our soul is a representative of the Being, of God, here in the Ignorance. Our soul is in a moment-to-moment transaction with Nature, a transaction which is being adjudicated by God, who has the final authority over any disputes. The soul, being a representative of the Being here in the Becoming, is the Truth of our individual Being which is gradually being “worked out” by our nature over time.

This bifurcation between the soul and Nature in the conditions of the Becoming in the Ignorance is crucial to the conception of Fate that

Sri Aurobindo is describing, which will be elaborated in the lines that follow. This is because the soul is a kind of representative of God within each individual being, the Being that is being “worked out” by Nature over time. In effect, the soul has a precedence over Nature, a command over Nature, because it is the soul’s Truth that is being “worked out” over time by its nature. Or put another way, it is Nature’s role to become the truth of the soul. That is what our nature is: the gradual becoming over time of the truth of our soul. Further, there is continual transaction taking place between the soul and Nature; we could say the soul is guiding or steering the nature in its activity and moving it in the direction of this “working out” of its Truth. The nature is ignorant, something like a complex machine or automobile, and left to its own processes it would move ignorantly this way and that. But behind it there is a soul that is steering it towards a particular destination through the winding, crowded and dirty streets of universal nature. The crucial question becomes who has the upper hand in this driving, the conscious soul who is trying to steer the car or the wayward, mechanical meanderings of the ignorant nature. This is the transaction that is being worked out moment-to-moment in our lives. Will we follow our soul, or will we follow our nature’s ignorant movements?

The idea of God being the arbiter suggests that the divine Being is watching over the evolutionary progress of each individual soul in its moment-to-moment transactions with its nature. After all, the soul is the representative of God in the ignorant nature, so it is but natural that God should oversee the soul’s progress in steering the nature to its intended destination. The significance of the transactions, which determine the direction the car moves at any given moment, as well as their arbitration, is elaborated in the lines that follow.

First, let us consider the significant line “Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny’s book”. Here Narad makes a subtle distinction between “Fate” and “Destiny”. It suggests that “Fate” is more like the present conditions in which the individual is stationed. Our fate may be to live in favorable conditions or unfavorable conditions, to be rich or poor, to have a pleasant life or a wretched one, to have a developed mind, life and body or an undeveloped one. It suggests that destiny, in contrast, is more akin to the goal to which the course of our evolution

is headed. Destiny is the destination; fate is our present location on the journey. Narad earlier has said that “fate is a transaction done / At every hour”; there is therefore a new balance that is drawn after each transaction between the soul and Nature. The more we follow the soul, the higher our balance in Destiny’s book, or in the terms of our other metaphor, the more we follow our soul, the more precisely our lives are steered towards our soul’s destination and the sooner we will arrive, that is, to our soul’s truth, to our true being, and to God.

Next, there is the striking sentence: “Man can accept his fate, he can refuse.” This goes back to the distinction I made earlier about fate being the “working out” of Truth in the Ignorance versus it being the “revealing” of Truth over time. This line strongly emphasizes the former interpretation, and this more dynamic interpretation is also supported by the idea of fate being a transaction done at every hour between the soul and Nature. But here the sage says that we can refuse our fate, that is, our present status, position, and direction in our evolutionary journey. It is the soul in us who accepts or refuses our fate, the representative of God in our humanity. Nature is the soul’s “becoming” over time, and the soul is the driver of the process; it can step on the brake, turn the car around, and step on the accelerator. Whereas we are where we are on the evolutionary path, we can decide to move off our present location and go elsewhere. We are not compelled to continue circling round Nature’s cul-de-sacs; we can turn onto a different road that leads directly to our destination, and we can drive fast or slow.

The final three lines hearken back to the notion that God is the arbiter of the transactions done between the soul and Nature. To repeat:

Even if the One maintains the unseen decree
He writes thy refusal in thy credit page:
For doom is not a close, a mystic seal.

If the soul refuses its fate, its present conditions and apparent future course, it can, or at least it can try to, alter these. If the momentum of nature is too much for it, the balance of its karma too adverse, its accumulated debts too high to wipe away in a single stroke, God the arbiter will nevertheless take note of the soul’s refusal. Its very attempt to refuse will go onto the credit side of the ledger of

its transactions with Nature and will certainly help its future fate, if not immediately in the present. It essentially suggests that every effort we make in support of our soul's evolution, even though it may presently fail to attain its objective, is still helpful for our spiritual progress and leaves its mark.

The next part of the passage reads as follows:

Arisen from the tragic crash of life,
Arisen from the body's torture and death,
The spirit rises mightier by defeat;
Its godlike wings grow wider with each fall.
Its splendid failures sum to victory.
O man, the events that meet thee on thy road,
Though they smite thy body and soul with joy and grief,
Are not thy fate, — they touch thee awhile and pass;
Even death can cut not short thy spirit's walk:
Thy goal, the road thou choosest are thy fate.

The first two sentences, while reaffirming the benefits of our soul-directed efforts even though they may fail in their immediate aims, expand on this idea in a dramatic way. But to understand this better, it may be useful to note that the soul, the divine representative of God within us, has accepted to enter into this ignorant world which at its base is inconscient, to gradually evolve here in this adverse environment through many lives in order to transform its ignorance and suffering into a divine life. Though the soul itself is immortal, through this long evolutionary process it identifies with its evolving physical, vital, and mental instruments of Nature in which it embodies itself on earth. Its divine strength, wisdom, and delight support these instruments of outer nature from its hidden seat deep within the heart center, but it shares in their ordeals and the difficulties of their slow growth. Here the poet amplifies those ordeals for us so we feel them: “the tragic crash of life”, “the body's torture and death”, “defeat”, “fall”. Through all these adversities which every soul that assumes a body in this world faces, the soul rises and grows mightier, its “wings grow wider” enabling it to soar higher. Why? I can think of three reasons. The first is that the soul supports the instrumental outer being of nature through these ordeals, so the soul grows stronger through the exercise of this supportive action, and the greater the

difficulty, the more weight it must lift. The second is that when we in our outer nature face ordeals, we are more likely to turn within towards our soul or the Divine. The third reason is suggested by another powerful sentence in *Savitri*: “Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break / A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart, / His slow inertia as of living stone” (p. 443). Pain, adversity and suffering are God’s tools for moulding matter and the human beings into more vibrant and responsive vehicles for his manifestation. Through our ordeals, our nature is being kneaded, transformed into a more refined and evolved form. In simple terms, we learn and grow fastest through our errors and sufferings. In the end, they add up to victory.

The next sentence in the remainder of this part of the passage again recalls and builds on the first part. To reiterate the lines:

O man, the events that meet thee on thy road,
Though they smite thy body and soul with joy and grief,
Are not thy fate, — they touch thee awhile and pass;
Even death can cut not short thy spirit’s walk:
Thy goal, the road thou choosest are thy fate.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that these ordeals that we face in life are not really our fate, they are just passing incidents in the growth and evolution of our soul. Even what seems to be the most adverse fate, an early death, as in the case of Satyavan, does not stop our soul’s progress. Indeed, like our struggles and sufferings, death may even help the soul in its growth. Here we may note that the threat of death, our very mortality, our knowledge that our days are numbered, may be one of the most powerful spurs to our spiritual growth. It drives us to concentrate ourselves on what is important, on what we would like to achieve in our life. At the same time, it impels us to find the meaning of life. It presents to us with its looming finality the mystery of our existence, a mystery which propels us inwards towards the immortal element within us, our soul. And, in a more practical way, death enables us to end one chapter of our spiritual evolution so that we may begin a new chapter in the next life. But it is the last line that is most pregnant with significance: “Thy goal, the road thou choosest are thy fate.” What Narad the sage seems to imply here is that our fate is not the immediate circumstances of our life, but rather the

direction of our movement and the goal towards which we are aiming. It is as if he were looking down at life from some higher altitude. At the ground level we only see the immediate environment, but if we look at ourselves from high above, we would see the topography of the surrounding area, the direction in which we are headed, the terrain of the path ahead, and the beauty of our destination. Looking from above we would not be distracted by the details of our present location, but would see our life and fate in the wider perspective of its position on the map of our spiritual journey's route.

The next part of the passage reads as follows:

On the altar throwing thy thoughts, thy heart, thy works,
Thy fate is a long sacrifice to the gods
Till they have opened to thee thy secret self
And made thee one with the indwelling God.
O soul, intruder in Nature's ignorance,
Armed traveller to the unseen supernal heights,
Thy spirit's fate is a battle and ceaseless march
Against invisible opponent Powers,
A passage from Matter into timeless self.
Adventurer through blind unforeseeing Time,
A forced advance through a long line of lives,
It pushes its spearhead through the centuries.

Next, Sri Aurobindo presents a more inward, mystical significance of fate, that it is a long sacrifice to the gods we make until they open to us our inner self and make us one with the Divine that dwells within us. This sacrifice is for most of our long spiritual journey an unconscious one. Our thoughts, emotions, and actions are at first offered to the various disguises of the Divine: to our friends, lovers, employers; to money, power, pleasure; as a duty to family, community, country, humanity, earth; to ideals moral, social, intellectual, religious, spiritual. At long last we recognize that behind all these appearances stands the one God and that He has been accepting our sacrifice through these appearances of His and gradually leading us through all His disguises to Himself. Then we offer ourselves consciously, lovingly, and gratefully to Him. It is only when we make that last conscious sacrifice complete, offering all our thoughts, emotions,

actions, and self to Him directly, that the doors open to the indwelling God, to our secret soul.

The next lines image fate as “a battle and ceaseless march / Against invisible opponent Powers, / A passage from Matter into timeless self”. This is an image Sri Aurobindo will expand upon in the next portion of the passage, but these lines suggest that this ceaseless march is the long evolutionary journey of the soul “through a long line of lives” from its immersion in inert matter to its realization of the spirit in the saint or yogi. But here I would like to reflect on these “invisible opponent Powers”. Of course, the main theme of the poem is Savitri’s battle with these opponent Powers, figured most pointedly in the god of Death, whom she pursues as he takes the soul of Satyavan into his shadowy realms. So the god of Death is one of these opponent Powers, and in the poem seems to represent them in general. But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have spoken and written about four primary adverse Powers: Inconscience (or Darkness), Falsehood, Suffering, and Death (e.g., CWSA 28: 464). Sri Aurobindo writes this about them: “The hostile Forces are Powers of Darkness who are in revolt against the Light and the Truth and want to keep this world under their rule in darkness and ignorance. Whenever anyone wants to reach the Truth, to realise the Divine, they stand in the way as much as possible. But what they are specially against is the work the Mother and myself are doing, to bring down the Light here into the earth and establish the Truth – that would mean their own expulsion. So they always try to destroy the work as a whole and to spoil the sadhana of each Sadhak. . . . The only way to avoid it is to be entirely turned towards the Mother and to refuse any opportunity to these Forces” (CWSA 28: 465). Regarding the Lord of Falsehood, the Mother has said, “At times he calls himself the ‘Lord of Nations’. It is he who sets all wars in motion, and only by thwarting his plans could the last war [World War II] be won ...” (*Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 1, March 26, 1959). She also said, “It is also perfectly sure that very soon his hour will come and all will be over for him, that he will have to disappear. And he absolutely refuses to change. He has no intention to do it, for immediately he will lose all his power. It is impossible. And he knows that he will disappear. But he proclaims categorically that before disappearing ... he will

do all that lies in his power to destroy, demolish, ruin, corrupt all he can. That is certain. Afterwards it is the downfall. He accepts the downfall on this condition” (CWM 5: 97-98).

Let us continue with the next part of the passage which expands on the image of fate as “a battle and ceaseless march”:

Across the dust and mire of the earthly plain,
On many guarded lines and dangerous fronts,
In dire assaults, in wounded slow retreats,
Holding the ideal’s ringed and battered fort
Or fighting against odds in lonely posts,
Or camped in night around the bivouac’s fires
Awaiting the tardy trumpets of the dawn,
In hunger and in plenty and in pain,
Through peril and through triumph and through fall,
Through life’s green lanes and over her desert sands,
Up the bald moor, along the sunlit ridge,
In serried columns with a straggling rear
Led by its nomad vanguard’s signal fires,
Marches the army of the waylost god.

This part of the passage is striking for its poetic style, especially the use of rich imagery, but also the agreement between its rhythm and its content. We note that it is a single long sentence, but punctuated with frequent commas which help convey the sense of a long, difficult march of an army battalion at war. We see and feel quite vividly the soldiers’ plight in various settings and scenarios. The passage in one sense is a metaphor for the soul’s difficult evolutionary journey through many lives, but the fact is that for many human lives, the experiences described here really are part of the soul’s journey, for war has been a prominent and constant part of earth’s human evolution. Sri Aurobindo shows a remarkable sensitivity and appreciation for these human experience, and though he himself never served in the armed forces, he lived through the two world wars, and in his inner cosmic consciousness, he was intimately aware of all that was happening, while at the same time putting his occult force behind the allied forces during the Second World War. Some of these occult interventions are described in Van Vrekhem’s biography *The Mother: The Story of Her Life* (see pp. 325-334).

But here Sri Aurobindo is describing in personal terms the experiences of individual soldiers. Another aspect of Sri Aurobindo's involvement with the war was his actual occult presence on the battlefield. This has been related by an American infantryman, John Kelly, who had frequent vivid visions of Sri Aurobindo, and sometimes of the Mother, so vivid that they conversed, and some in which Sri Aurobindo told him which way to run to save himself. These experiences are related in a book called *Great Sir and Heavenly Lady* by Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, as well as in the book *Antithesis of Yoga* by Aurovilian Jocelyn. I myself met John in 1984 and he related the story to me in person. Here are some extracts about his first encounter with Sri Aurobindo on the battlefield that he related in an interview with Gordon Korstange which was published in *Collaboration*, an American journal on Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, in 1984:

We were in a zigzag trench down this mountain which was a graveyard from the first World War. I had heard that from the Napoleonic wars there were people buried there ... There were crosses. We were near a wood road up in the forest. The original company had been wiped out almost to a man ... as far as I know. There were German and American bodies lying on the field amid the pine trees. It was a big jungle of torn-up trees and earth....

After some time, one day, two days, god knows, it was freezing up there, the middle of winter. Time stood still. Finally one night late there was nobody near me... I saw a wisp of white smoke in front of me, a little whiff of smoke, like cigarette smoke. Little sparks of light started to emanate out of that little wisp. It was moving to my right from 'no-man's land'. My eyes were fastened on it like a rabbit's. The smoke kept growing and turned into a haze, and the sparks coming out of it were enormous. My mind was working feverishly, very rapid ... so ... out of that came a bubbling laughter, gentle laughter of a wise old man. It came out like champagne, and actually I heard the 'ppp' of a bottle and the fizz. That effervescent sound with the light in front of me became a delightful fascination. And frightening. The laughter kept

getting louder, in my head perhaps. I don't know. But it was very gentle and very wise, and suddenly I see a mouth and a beard start to form, then the eyes, and the eyes sent out this light that hit me, and I fell back in the hole. I said, "Oh god. I think I struck pay dirt here"....

The laughter was one of the most incredible things of tone value that I had ever heard. What I felt was that the laughter itself was talking to me. Now, you see, there is such a thing as mocking laughter, hilarious laughter, you can laugh every way. You can laugh, you know, for all kinds of reasons. There's a whole vocabulary of laughter that I became attuned to and the nuances of the laughter.

But then I looked up and standing there in front of me, on the battlefield, was the full figure, a man with a white beard and white hair hanging down in a sheet like a Roman emperor. He's leaning against this tree a little bit, and he's signing to my left. I don't know if the moon was out that night, but the light on his face was golden. You could see a certain kind of refinement in this being that was extraordinary, an aesthetic face that really doesn't show up in his photographs at all. There was suffering and the conquering of suffering. All of that was there....

Anyway, the contact was constant. He was giving directions, and I was always refusing to accept them. And he was like a periscope. He could look around. He could see in the distance where it was safe and where we should go. That was very beneficial to me. But still, you can have your father take you by the hand and lead you into the candy store, and still you're gonna be disgruntled. I was disgruntled. Though I was in a very advantageous position with having such a guide. Still, the gloom. At least I had somebody to complain to! (*Collaboration, Vol X No 2 (1984), pp. 16-18*)

You can read the entire article and see some related photos at the Collaboration website: collaboration.org. Look for the tab for journal issues. This issue is 1984, vol. X, No. 2.

We now come to the concluding part of the passage, which describes the concluding part of the “passage from Matter into timeless self”.

Then late the joy ineffable is felt,
Then he remembers his forgotten self;
He has refound the skies from which he fell.
At length his front’s indomitable line
Forces the last passes of the Ignorance:
Advancing beyond Nature’s last known bounds,
Reconnoitring the formidable unknown,
Beyond the landmarks of things visible,
It mounts through a miraculous upper air
Till climbing the mute summit of the world
He stands upon the splendour-peaks of God.

Sri Aurobindo says, “Then late the joy ineffable is felt”. This word “late” carries a lot of poignant significance. It carries with it reverberations of that “battle and ceaseless march” and that “forced advance through a long line of lives”. One of the striking things about Sri Aurobindo’s vision and writings is the extraordinarily wide perspective he brings to life. It is like John Kelly said, “And he was like a periscope. He could look around. He could see in the distance where it was safe and where we should go”. In this line, the word “late” reminds us of where we have come from and then he shows us where we are going: to “the joy ineffable”. But that ineffable joy does not come early, it comes late. There are the many lives of toil and battle and suffering, and then, when the sacrifice enters the conscious phase, there is the long course of sadhana. Even then there is a long period of preparation of the mental, vital, and physical nature, the reorienting of all one’s energies, aims, aspirations, efforts, desires, and activities away from the satisfaction of one’s ego to a sacred offering to the Divine. This cannot be done in a day. The Mother once said “In almost, almost all cases, a very very sustained effort is needed to become aware of one’s psychic being. Usually it is considered that if one can do it in thirty years one is very lucky—thirty years of sustained effort, I say. It may happen that it’s quicker. But this is so rare that immediately one says, “This is not an ordinary human being.” That’s the case of people who have been considered more or less divine beings and who were great yogis, great initiates” (CWM

7: 269). Perhaps now that the supramental consciousness is at work in the earth consciousness and the divine help is more powerful, the time may be shortened, but the process of purification and reorienting of the nature must still take place, and it depends in the beginning and for a long time on the personal effort of the sadhaka.

And then “the joy ineffable is felt”. The phrase is so simple and so deep. The joy is so incredible it cannot be described, cannot be expressed. It is like that language of laughter spoken of by John Kelly. In the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo’s yogic diary, he writes of the various types of Ananda that he was experiencing and working to establish in his consciousness. In the *Glossary to the Record of Yoga*, which is available online, there are defined many forms of Ananda. The divine bliss can be experienced in all the different planes and parts of the being and nature in different ways and different intensities. Here are a few examples:

ānandamaya līlā — the world as a rapturous game of the
ānandamaya īśvara / puruṣa;
shama ānanda — ananda filled with peace; calm delight;
hāsyamaya ānanda — delight full of laughter;
ānanda vāñī — beatific voice;
shārīr ānanda — (also called physical ananda) “the total
physical delight” experienced when spiritual ananda “can flow
into the body and inundate cell and tissue”.

Life often does not feel so wonderful and delightful to us because our mental vision of life breaks it up into fragments which we take as wholes existing in an adverse or indifferent environment. But when we see and know the Divine in each being and thing, when we see that “The universe is an endless masquerade”, as Sri Aurobindo describes it elsewhere in *Savitri* (p. 61), when we see all that is and happens as the Divine and surrounded and pervaded by the Divine, our experience changes into one of unspeakable delight.

The next lines – “Then he remembers his forgotten self; / He has refound the skies from which he fell” – remind us that the world of bliss is our home. Our life here in this world of pain and suffering is a journey our soul has taken into the Night to reclaim it and bring it back to the light of the Divine. This is our adventure and our battle.

When we enter into the world of ignorance through the gates of birth, we forget our home. But between each earthly life we do go back to a world of divine delight, the psychic world, to rejuvenate and to further map out our continuing evolutionary journey on earth.

Finally, after reaching a very high level of development on earth, we are able to push through the bounds of the Ignorance into the Infinite, into the Unknown. There, our souls mount “through a miraculous upper air”. These seem to be the regions of the spiritual mind consciousness above the intellectual mind and towering up towards the Supermind. Earth’s atmosphere consists of five layers: the troposphere, which is the normal sky we see; and above it, the stratosphere; the mesosphere; the thermosphere; and the exosphere. Similarly, above our human mind there are four higher layers of spiritual mind: the higher mind, the illumined mind, the Intuition, and the overmind. Even overmind is a very high part of the mind, and beyond it lies the supramental consciousness which is not mind at all but a different kind of consciousness with a different substance. In the ascent towards the supramental consciousness we mount through these higher layers of spiritual mind. They are not abstract and analytical like the intellectual mind, but miraculous, full of lights, colours, rushes of force and ecstasy, and a powerful will and activity for realization and transformation.

Eventually we will reach the summits, the splendour-peaks of God, from where we will look out over the entire creation, see it in one grand view. Not only will we see it as if removed from it in the far distance, but we will become it, we will enter into its very substance, know it as we know ourselves. We will attain the vision of God himself, the Divine Being who is above all but who also is all, and we will participate in his wonderful and various delight of infinite conscious Being.

Savitri Bhavan – Mission Statement

1. Savitri Bhavan is a centre dedicated to fostering a living sense of Human Unity through spiritual education based on the vision and teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.
2. Savitri Bhavan is welcoming *Savitri*- lovers from every corner of the world.
3. During the inauguration of the first building of Savitri Bhavan, Nirod-da, the scribe of Sri Aurobindo, considered Savitri Bhavan to be the twin of Matrimandir, both meant to spread the message of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The base of the statue of Sri Aurobindo at the entrance of the institution contains Sri Aurobindo's relics.
4. Savitri Bhavan aims to gather and create, to house and share all kinds of materials and activities that will foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of *Savitri*; of the lives, work, and vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; and of the 'Aims and Ideals of Auroville'.
5. Savitri Bhavan is committed to a 'learning society' and tries to look into the future by supporting 'constant progress and unending education' and the growth of consciousness by eliminating as much as possible all harmful reflexes of the past in preparation for the search for a greater knowledge and a transition towards a truer life.
6. Savitri Bhavan is dedicated to a 'kind economy' and provides its services free of charge. It is maintained through donations.
7. The Savitri Hostel (an integral part of Savitri Bhavan) is not a commercial venture, it is meant to provide accommodation for supporters, well-wishers, and people working in the institution. Expenses here are equally covered through donations against receipts (tax-free for Indian Nationals).



Dealing with Vital Difficulties

*A talk by Dr. Alok Pandey at Savitri Bhavan
on 3 January 2024*

Man's life is described in the Vedas as a battle and a pilgrimage, and Sri Aurobindo also speaks of it in that manner. There is a far destination towards which we have to go, and it is a pilgrimage because it ends in meeting the Godhead and becoming one with That, but the way, the path, is through a battlefield. In the beginning this battle seems to be outside us: we are fighting with people, we are fighting with the environment, we are fighting with all the forces around us. But as we enter into the subjective spaces, which is where yoga begins to take place, we discover that, in the words of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*,

This hidden foe lodged in the human breast
Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.
This is the inner war without escape.¹

The journey goes from outside to inside, to within ourselves. And then either we can lock ourselves up within and transit to some other world or we can return from within outward: that is the whole journey of yoga.

There is a human aspiration, which we all carry, for an ideal world. Today somebody sent me a New Year message: "Imagine there's no countries". It is a song we are all familiar with, with nice little graphics of people living in peace: there are no boundaries, no religions; everything is wonderful, beautiful. The point is that this aspiration for an ideal perfect world, for an ideal perfect human state, is something inbuilt within us. It is a dream. It is the 'Dream Divine' which has been sown in our hearts. And this is not for the first time that it has come up. If we look into the ages that have passed, we

1. *Savitri*, p. 448.
2. *Savitri*, p. 655.

see that mankind has carried this dream despite multiple failures and collapses. We often observe that one of the signs of adolescence is that this dream surges up, and the sign of maturity is that we stifle the dream. We say it is not realisable, unfortunately. So we struggle ahead, as Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*, with “The swift and the lame foot, wing strong, wing broken”;² this is the strange enigma of human life.

Why does this happen? We start life with great aspirations, high hopes, and when we enter into the yoga for some time, we are on cloud nine. Some of us straightaway plunge into the yoga of the cells and such things. As we go through the journey, we discover more and more the intricate web of forces that are around us in which we seem to be trapped or held back, as if there is no release, no way out. And then we begin to wonder what really is this ordeal of yoga. People come to yoga thinking, “Oh, finally I found peace”. When people would come to the Mother saying, “I want to find my ground of peace”, she would say, “If you want peace, go to Ramana Ashram; there you can find peace”. There is peace here too, but it is a dense concentrated peace within the Ashram. But there is also a battle. Actually, all yoga is a battle, in a way. Why is it a battle? Because, to start with, normal life moves along at a slow pace. Though it is also moving towards the same destination, it progresses at a very slow pace. Also, there is no proper orientation. One carries things along such as one’s family and circumstances. Many people stay forever in the circumstances of their birth, in their religion, in their way of life, in their thoughts and beliefs. That is their comfort zone, built by themselves, and then slowly they will progress, little by little. But in yoga, this progress becomes concentrated, intensified. So it is very disorienting to start with. If we want to escape the law of earthly gravitation which holds us back, then after some time, we realise that we need another kind of fuel; all traditional yogas have spoken about it. They speak about six basic enemies that are a threat to our yogic evolution and progress. Sri Aurobindo says that if yoga is not your chosen path, basically you have to struggle and fight, for there is a band of the spirit’s enemies whom we have to face, and of which humanity is composed. And when we begin to go beyond, then this becomes a serious issue. It is not a problem as long as we are leading a so-called ‘normal’ life, which is not meant to go beyond a certain

limit. But the moment we want to go further, then these things which have been part of our everyday life begin to stifle us.

So there is always a battle, and as Sri Aurobindo says in one of his famous letters, no yoga is easy, like “French without tears.” One needs to put effort; this is insisted in all yogas. But when it comes to Sri Aurobindo’s yoga, the battle becomes much more fierce. Why? Because in traditional yoga, you want to escape from your difficulties. I often use this analogy: Suppose you are stuck in a territory governed by the ISIS and you want to escape. We have heard the famous story of a girl escaping from the clutches of the Taliban; a movie has been made on that. So one has to fight. It is not easy. But still, after some time, one gets a release, gets a passage; there are people who will help one to escape from a particular limited territory. But imagine the same girl saying, “I want to change this place. I want to change its functioning, its laws, its way of life”; then the resistance is going to be hundred times more. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga aims at not just an escape from earthly life, but a transformation of earthly life. Therefore, the challenge is hundred times greater.

So, where does the change begin? One of the things which I have often spoken about I would like to repeat here. We come to live in the Ashram or Auroville after we have read beautiful things. We have read about a beautiful future, and we believe we are now walking into utopia. But the utopia has to be built. If we do not build our utopia, that means we are not ready for it, even if it is utopia. Imagine you go to Kailash, the abode of Shiva, but you have no faith and you do not have the capability to surrender. Then you will shiver in the cold; you will be afraid of the serpent Vasuki who is around His neck, the bull Nandi and the rat which is moving around; you will be afraid of everything. They are all in perfect harmony in the consciousness of Shiva: the rat, the snake and the peacock. But you will be unhappy if in that entire region of Kailash, instead of Shiva and Parvati, you are seeing everything else. So, it starts this way: we believe we have entered utopia, but there is a passport and a key to utopia. Likewise, this dream of mankind that imagines that there are no boundaries is a beautiful dream, but it cannot be realised unless we have found our divine Self, to serve as a starter. All else will follow. Whether it is the yoga of transformation or the transmutation of the physical cells

or anything else, first one should be well-grounded in the Divine Consciousness, without which anything else is just impossible; all will remain only talk. That is why Sri Aurobindo speaks about these powers which stop us, these forces that do not allow us to go ahead and give us a tough battle. In speaking about this battle he says it is ‘the decisive ordeal of this yoga’. These forces have their house in the vital, especially the lower vital. We will see how these forces came into play.

If you look at the evolutionary process, these forces have pressed upon matter – which is such a hard nut to crack – to make life spring forth; so they are tremendous forces and extremely strong. On the other hand, they themselves have emerged tearing the veil of matter, in which life was immersed, and therefore these forces have almost burst forth from the hard core of matter. They are *Rudra* forces, the forces of lust and anger, and they have held earth nature in their sway, because they were necessary at a point in Time. We may say that matter ‘needed evil’: but for them matter would not have stirred. There is a story in one of the Upanishads about how matter was made to stir.

We may have beautiful thoughts, we may think about lovely things, but unless the victory is achieved in this lower vital domain, there will not be a permanent change. These are the forces that still hold our life in their grip. And that is why human beings who begin to take to the spiritual life, in the beginning, develop a strange kind of dual being within themselves: one part which is beginning to aspire for beautiful things and the other part which pulls back.

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.¹

When we encounter this challenge in the yogic life, there are some typical attitudes we take, some which are helpful, some which are

1. Sri Aurobindo, “A Tree”, *Collected Poems*, p. 207.

hurtful, some which are dangerous. One attitude is to cover them up, brush them under the carpet, and its sign is that we see evil in everyone else. Often people say that they start seeing hostile forces, adverse forces around them. Of course, Sri Aurobindo has written perhaps a few pages on adverse forces, but basically the stress is on seeing the Divine in everyone and everywhere. And the Mother also speaks about it that the fundamental realisation of yoga is to see the Divine everywhere and in everyone. After that the hostile forces can be tackled, if at all they are there. So, in the beginning, we have to just go past the adversary like an arrow shooting towards its target. We do not have to look left or right, but go straight forward and discover That, without which all else will not work out. Then yes – once Arjuna has secured Sri Krishna – the victory is certain. But the first task is to secure Sri Krishna: we must make sure that He will be the charioteer, and only then venture into the battlefield; otherwise, it is just not possible.

So, we must know that these forces are there, and if we put them under cover, we will see them in everybody else but not in ourselves. That is how quarrels begin. Most often they begin because I have this idea that I am right; it starts with that. The next is that I am the only one who is right; everybody else is wrong. And then there is a fight, there is a quarrel, all for petty things. There is the story of a monastery which was not doing well. The monks were fighting with each other, so people lost faith and money was not coming. They called a yogi to sort out things. He called the monks who



were managing the place, each one separately, and told something in their ears and said, “Don’t disclose this to any other person”. And he went away. After that some of the things began to improve. After a few years when everything improved, they said, “Let us now consult each other. What did he tell you?” As it turned out, he had told the same thing to each one of them. It was that “one of you, one among you, is an incarnation of God”. And that made life ‘difficult’ for the monks. The moment any of them was angry and ruffled with anyone else in the group, he would think, “what if *he* is the incarnation of God?” So things began to improve and change.

What is the basis of harmony? The basis of harmony is not adjustment or tolerance. It is the fact that there is the Divine presence in everyone. That is the baseline; of course, there are many other things. But the baseline is that there is the Divine presence in everyone. But this is precisely what the lower vital refuses to accept or acknowledge; therefore, it brings up its own revolt in certain characteristic ways. It likes to quarrel. At one place the Mother says: “It is so strange that human beings quarrel”. But I think *we* would put it the other way: if people are not quarrelling, we wonder, “Do they really love each other?”, because that is how life today is.

When a person seeks to evolve, then these challenges come, and one way people deal with it is by putting them under the carpet. But due to the nature of Truth, it cannot remain hidden. The Mother has spoken about life in the Ashram; I believe it applies to Auroville also, because Auroville too is the Mother’s space, fully. And it is going to be more and more so because now that the Matrimandir, the soul of Auroville, has been installed, the hidden problems are going to show up in the open. The Mother once gave a message to Ashram: “Don’t do anything here which you want to hide because nothing can remain hidden here”, since it is the action of Truth. So human nature begins to show up. The year 2018 was the 50th year of Auroville. Now the soul of Auroville is active, and we see that problems begin to come up, and it is putting pressure on all the points which refuse to yield.

Where are these points where the battle starts, in a community as well as in individuals? That is the lower vital. And what does the lower vital want to do? It wants to carry on its own way. Sri Aurobindo

speaks of certain characteristic ways in which this revolt of the lower vital manifests. One of them is as arrogance and vanity. Vanity and arrogance take the attitude that “I am right”. Often this takes a very limiting form: “My name is Benjamin and all the knowledge I have is the real knowledge, and all that I do not know is not knowledge”. Sometimes it goes even further. I have heard people say, “No, no, the Mother does not know, and that is why she has said this”. It can go to any extent. It can be very dangerous. We do not realise that we are playing with fire. Long back when I was involved with the Bangalore Bhavan and some relics were going to come there, somebody just cautioned me saying, “You know you are bringing the relics here, but I hope you know that it is like playing with fire.” I said, “yes yes”, without realising what it meant. Now I realise that it was like playing with fire because what was coming was the Truth, to stand forever.

As human beings we have instinctively learned to put up a good facade. We live with this idea that “I know it all”. This is lack of humility. One of the things the Mother says is that a great protection against hostile forces is humility, sincerity and vigilance. Humility: it opens the doors to knowledge. “I don’t know”: just to acknowledge that I do not know is the most commonsensical thing. After all, one does not know beyond the tip of one’s nose. And yet we live in this arrogance and vanity that “I know it all”. In Indian thought there are six kinds of *pramana*, proof, evidence, and one of them is ‘*Aaptha vakya pramana*’. The word of the Seer is taken as such, without questioning: “Yes, I have not reached where he has reached, he has seen what I have not seen; so I don’t question him, because he has seen it”. We can cultivate that vision. Nobody is asking us to believe it. That is why there is yoga: a way that we too can see something they have seen but we have not seen yet. One can see it if one follows the path. That is the logic of the path. But if one keeps doubting what has been seen, what has been revealed, then there is little hope. One can carry on one’s own way – and that is the freedom of life – but, as Sri Aurobindo says, we may come a cropper.

This is one of the ways that the lower vital forces manifest: as vanity and arrogance. And this becomes worse when one refuses to realise one’s own ignorance, believes that one knows when not knowing –

then it becomes so difficult. Often the lower vital takes this attitude and prevents the change of the external person or what we normally call 'our character'.

People ask me sometimes, "Why is it that in Sri Aurobindo communities we see very difficult people?" I have two answers to that. One is the action of the Truth. Those of us who have lived in the outside world know how we can appear pleasant but carry venom inside. The same person who in the office behaves politely comes home and behaves like an animal with claws and fangs. Even night and day have an effect on human behaviour. It is known and yogis have discovered it, and if we are sincere, we too will see what daytime brings: all beautiful thoughts, hopes, aspiration, and what night brings, what fatigue does to us; it is a whole study in itself. This is how we begin to develop a dual behaviour. The second reason we see difficult people in the Ashram is where will the most difficult cases go but to the Supreme Healer? So we see those lower forces expressed because they cannot remain hidden, unlike in the outer world where they can. In the outside world, we think that the facade is what the person is, but it is a facade. So, a danger of the lower vital is that it puts up facades, shows, shams, and then we discover new shams when we take to spiritual life: "I am a *sadhak*, and that is something great!" Sometimes, the status *sadhak* comes with a serious grave tone: "Oh, he's a *sadhak*; don't disturb him". People often ask, when they make a call, "I hope I have not disturbed your meditation". We are not supposed to do only a special meditation at specific times, but to stay in that state all the time. If one gets disturbed, then one does not know how to meditate. That is the Mother's answer. Once the Mother asked a person to cut some wood, for making something with the wood. In that process noise is inevitable, and somebody was very disturbed. He told him to stop it, "because I'm meditating". So the first *sadhak* wrote to the Mother, "What do I do? shall I follow your instructions, or listen to this person whose meditation is disturbed? I think I am committing a grave sin by disturbing him in his meditation". The Mother replied, "Continue the work; that person does not know how to meditate". And then she added, "One can meditate even in the battlefield and the whole *Gita* is about that. One can meditate in the battlefield with the arrows whizzing past,

hissing, with death and destruction all around. One can still be focused on the immortal.” But this is something which the lower vital does not know. So he [the *sadhak*] puts up a facade, an acceptable front: wears a different kind of dress, puts up a smile, grows a beard, does anything that helps to keep up the show, keep up the sham. But all this is going to go away. They did these things at a certain age, but all such shows and shams are going to be thrown away. This is what we have seen happening especially since the 1980s and 1990s. Nobody can continue with that kind of facade forever.

When somebody asked the Mother, “Mother, now that the Supermind has come, what are the things that the Supermind will throw out of the universe?”, the Mother replied, “Throw away? What do you mean? If we accept what Sri Aurobindo has written, it will remove nothing from the universe”. Then after a moment she added, “But yes, it will put each thing in its right place”. That is what evil is about: things not being in their right place. And a second thing she added, “Yes, one thing it will throw away, and that is hypocrisy”. All of us who say today’s children are gone cases, because they are experts at tearing away the mask, should remember that: what the Supermind will throw away is hypocrisy. You cannot pose as a swami – a swami is someone who has attained self-mastery. If you do not have mastery over yourself it will show.

The lower vital puts up a show, and it starts believing in that lie. That is very dangerous: “I am developed, so this lowly act is impossible for me”. This is a disconcerting experience in yoga, and I am sure many would have experienced it. I have experienced it too. You feel “I am freed from this”. And then one has to pray like Augustine, “Lord grant me Chastity”. But then you succumb again, and say, “Oh God, I did it again”. And then you pray some more. So, slowly, you learn how to navigate. One discovers that guilt is not part of yoga, but the struggle and battle are. And after sometime one discovers the secret: the secret is that instead of tormenting yourself and fighting and struggling with these forces, cultivate the light, cultivate the truth. Instead of struggling with lust, cultivate love; instead of struggling with darkness, cultivate light; instead of struggling with hatred and jealousy, cultivate generosity, cultivate nobility. And as these things grow in one’s nature, instead of struggling with arrogance (which is

the most undetected), cultivate humility. This is the way we discover that these things gradually become lesser and lesser. We have to grow in the positive dimensions of yoga.

Another characteristic of the lower vital is the resistance that it offers. The ordeal of the yoga is that there is dissimulation and disobedience, and so much emphasis is given by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to get rid of these. Here disobedience is not about each other. In *Savitri* there is a line: ‘*Obedience is his princely training’s school*’¹: obedience is the training school before you can wear the crown and be the king. When we read the stories of the great kings in India, we would know that we had a system. One did not automatically become a king because he inherited the kingdom. He had to go through a stage of obedience in *gurukul* where he had to forget that he is a king or a prince. The entire emphasis of those days in *gurukul* was on *brahmacharya* in the first 20 years of life. What is *brahmacharya*? It is about learning to discipline one’s vital. Often, as a psychologist, I divide children’s ages, as they grow up, into three periods. The first seven years they are mainly a body with a little bit of vital, but a very nice, sweet vital. This is the period when mothers say, “Oh my child is so lovely, so wonderful”. Then, in the next seven years we see that the lower vital comes up which is a challenge that parents face. And the sign of maturity is when the mind develops in the next seven years, that is from 14 to 21. When it masters the vital, it is the sign of a developed, mature human being. There have been ages of mankind when this mastery was emphasised. It was a part of growing up. You were not considered to have grown up into an adult unless you had learned to master the unruly vital.

Often people asked the Mother, “What is freedom?” and she used to say, “Freedom does not mean license to do anything and everything. And it can never be freedom by its very nature.” But the lower vital wants freedom; it says, “I will do what I feel like”. She said, “Nobody is here to do whatever they wish to do.” If they did, life cannot continue; it is not natural, and we will end up destroying ourselves and everyone else. There is freedom to make choices and to go through the consequences. Some semblance of freedom begins

1. *Savitri*, p. 125.

when the mind has actually begun to master the vital and it is not at the mercy of the idea that every thought that comes to me is right. For the vital, every WhatsApp message that I receive must be true; every friend who gives me a suggestion, if it is not accepted, will no longer be a friend; and every emotion that stirs my heart is true. But if one moves with that current, it can take one very far away from the goal. Even to become a developed human being this mastery is needed. Very beautifully, the Mother describes in one of her conversations the characteristic of a human being: the mind mastering the vital. That is what man is. And less than that? He is of course a man in the sense that he does not have horns, fangs or a tail. Still, he is only a man for namesake, he is not yet a man. Like an animal, he is still governed by the vital, which takes him in all directions.

Where does spiritual life begin? Sri Aurobindo speaks about the next level of evolution as the Superman. He says man governing the vital by the mind is truly a man. That is where moral evolution comes into play, but the Divine transcends morality. Sri Aurobindo says that very few can spare themselves to pass this and take a leap. It is just not possible; one will stumble and fall. At the human level, there are moral values. But we all know that they are not ultimate and they are not final. In India we use the word *sattwic* to describe a person who has a certain degree of self-mastery. This is what makes a man. But what makes a spiritual man? Control and mastery of the mind by the higher spiritual consciousness. What does it mean? We have a beautiful image of the senses in the *Gita*: five horses [the five senses] driving a carriage in which the mind is seated. If the senses are driving like the horses and the man is sitting there, you may ask the man, “You seem to be enjoying the ride?” and he would reply, “Yes, these horses are taking me on a jolly ride; I go where the horses take me”. What would we say to such a person? “You fool, they may take you down the drain”. And he would say, “Keep your *jnana* [knowledge] to your side. Let me enjoy my trip”. But the line between a trip turning into a good trip or a bad trip is very thin. There have been civilisations where self-mastery was a way of life and it had been inbuilt in the fabric of the society. The second image of the *Gita* is that of the mind controlling the horses: that is where we have the ropes tying the horses and there is a person [the mind]

sitting there who can control the horses. But who would control the mind? Mind also can come easily under their sway.

The third problem is self-justification. Having tendencies is not a problem, but self-justification is not right. Very often it goes like this: “I get angry naturally because somebody is always triggering it.” Always that somebody is to be blamed. And if there is nobody to blame, ultimately God who made us has to take the blame. But complaining and blaming God does not help one become still. So instead of complaining and grumbling, whatever be the reason, now the only course is “let me open to His help and come out of this morass in which I am caught”.

Self-justification is a very dangerous habit, and people who have developed minds have very sophisticated justifications. I can give you one example. Somebody was admitted in JIPMER. He was a *sadhak*, but was very angry, impatient and went on complaining: “Why is this here? why is it not here?” The doctor asked, “Sir, we are very ordinary people, but you are supposed to be a yogi. Why are you behaving like this?” And his answer was, “You don’t understand yoga. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga brings out all these things.” The doctor said, “If this is what yoga is, I’d better stay away for some time”. Well, there is some truth in what he said: that it brings out things which are hidden. But it does not mean that we should bring it out chaotically. It does not mean that I will have no control over myself. Nor can I say, “Well, I am drinking a lot because this is the problem with the world, and I have taken it upon myself”. It may be true, but to be a man, one needs a certain degree of self-mastery over the vital.

But still we are caught up in mental concepts, and a spiritual being is somebody who has become free from those frameworks of belief and conception in which we try to tie the reality: “God is this, God is that, the Mother said this, the Mother said that”, quote, unquote, misquote and all that. We have to come out of all this and live and breathe in that higher consciousness; then we truly become a spiritual being. Then the mind is also mastered: the thoughts will not govern us; instead we will govern the thoughts.

The Mother speaks of it in one of the last talks which she gave in the playground on the *Dhammapada*. She took up this text, she said,

because “This is a basic lesson: how to master the mind and how to control the mind”. It is one of the best conversations of the Mother and is called “On the *Dhammapada*”. They are part of the *Collected Works of the Mother*, Volume 3, and were taken up from April to August 1958. These conversations are so beautiful: how to control the mind, what kind of thoughts we must entertain, what kind of thoughts are harmful and detrimental. And in one of the classes, she speaks about speech: how dangerous are gossiping, slandering or speaking ill of others. Often, we say we are doing the Mother’s work. But, at the same time, if we think ill about somebody or indulge in gossiping, actually, in a sense, we are criticising her work, because she is working in that person. We should not take that course. We should not make judgments about people because She is working within that person in her own way. It is going to take time. As we work upon ourselves, it brings a certain generosity of nature, and here the Mother uses the phrase, ‘sunny tolerance’.

These are the hurdles: self-justification, disobedience and indiscipline. Sri Aurobindo says this is the ‘decisive ordeal of this yoga’. If you choose that path, then talking about supramental and all this becomes meaningless. It is there in *Letters on Yoga*, in the fourth volume of the letters. It is titled ‘The decisive ordeal of this yoga’. This was written to someone who has been referred to by many as a very advanced *sadhak*. Here we should be very careful. There is only one advanced *sadhak*, or two if you want to put it that way: The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. All the rest of us are brothers and sisters, sharing the joy, struggling and helping each other. That is how it is. Here Sri Aurobindo speaks about the lower vital defects as the ‘Cardinal defect’. He writes, ‘*whatever there may be in these higher parts, aspiration to the Truth, devotion or will to conquer the obstacles and the hostile forces, it cannot become integral, it cannot remain unmixed and unspoiled or continue to be effective so long as the lower vital and the external personality have not accepted the light and consented to change*’.¹ Then He says, ‘*It was inevitable that in the course of the sadhana, these inferior parts of the nature should be brought forward, in order that like the rest of the being,*

1. *Letters on Yoga*, Vol. 4, p. 150.

they may make the crucial choice and either accept or refuse transformation'.¹

But Sri Aurobindo gives a very long rope, as he did to Amrita when he got friendly with a girl. Amrita took it as a sanction of the Lord. One day Amrita told him, "I'm planning to get married", and Sri Aurobindo said, "What nonsense!" Then he asked, "But why did you allow me to go so far?" and Sri Aurobindo replied, "To see how far you can go".

This yoga is not like a religion where you forcibly suppress something, and keep it inside; it is not putting on a cover or a mask outside while harbouring all those things inside. At some point, these things have to be handled, but only at 'some point'. Many people start with the struggle in the beginning itself, and that also is not advisable. That was why Sri Aurobindo was not very keen on taking people who were very young into the yoga, because the lower vital will throw up things. At first they live in a kind of idealism, but then, when they face the ground reality, many lose the flame, which is unfortunate. But there are a few who nurture it and keep it and grow it. They find the way and the right means, and eventually they become a bridge between the earth and heaven; but that is a long journey. These are the challenges of the journey. At some point these things will come up and one has to tackle them; because of the action of Truth they cannot remain hidden.

Sri Aurobindo continues, '*My whole work depends upon this movement. It is the decisive ordeal of this yoga*'.² And then he says something very interesting: '*If the little external personality is to persist in retaining its obscure and limited, its petty and ignoble, its selfish and false and stupid human consciousness, this amounts to a flat negation of the work and the sadhana. I have no intention of giving my sanction to a new edition of the old fiasco*'.³

This is the fiasco he talks about: it is about letting the lower vital habits play. We can see it blatantly in every religion, in every cult; it

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

is on display there. And this he does not want: outwardly we are very nice, but inwardly we are harbouring all that is dark and dangerous and ugly. So he says that if somebody persists in this, it will give only ‘*a partial and transient spiritual opening within with no true and radical change in the law of the external nature. If, then, any sadhaka refuses in practice [now see his compassion] to admit this change, [first it is about refusing in practice, then he puts in] or if he refuses even to admit the necessity for any change of his lower vital being and his habitual external personality, I am entitled to conclude that, whatever his profession, he has not accepted, either myself or my yoga*’.¹

If somebody says, “I want to go my own way” and still claims that “I am Sri Aurobindo’s devotee”, that is not enough. Sri Aurobindo has to say, “Yes, you are my devotee”. But it is like when Narad was going around saying “I am the greatest servant of the Lord.” Finally, when he comes to Lord Vishnu, the Lord says, “You are always in a hurry. Have you seen what is written in my book? In my book your name figures much later”. So, this yoga is not about belonging to an organisation, an institution, or saying “I’m Sri Aurobindo’s devotee”, giving lectures, writing books, conducting seminars – none of this. At the end of the day, what will matter is whether one is able to take this great evolutionary challenge, this inner war, and of course, not all are called upon for this. One thing should be very clear: life moves in its own way, and the world is full of all kinds of things. The Mother would say in effect, “there are things which one does who wants to enjoy life; one does whatever one feels like. But yoga is a special field, this is meant for a special evolutionary purpose.”

Sri Aurobindo further says [see that compassion], ‘*I am well aware that this change is not easy. The dynamic Will towards it does not come at once [dynamic will means “I want to change”, and when there is no dynamic will there is no effort] and is difficult to fix and, even afterwards, the sadhaka often feels helpless against the force of habit. Knowing this, the Mother and myself have shown and are still showing sufficient patience in giving time for the true spirit to come up.... But if in any one this part not only becomes obstinate,*

1. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

self-assertive or aggressive, but it is supported and justified by the mind, ... it is a different and very serious matter'.¹ So it is one thing to have a defect, but quite another to support and justify it by the mind. The right way is not to justify it and to get rid of it: to keep striving, to put in one's own effort, to call for grace, to stand back, become detached, call for peace; there are a hundred things you can do. Stay busy, if nothing else. But the human mind has so many ways of justifying itself.

We can stay busy, but do not concern yourself with all kinds of things. People have devised a new phrase nowadays: 'spiritual activism', which refers to becoming involved in various social causes such as environmental protection, antiwar protests, or advocating human equality based on spiritual principles. You should be very careful about this kind of new spirituality. The first thing is to find the Divine, to see the Divine everywhere, to become one with the Divine Will, to surrender one's own will to the Divine. Then, yes, go like Arjuna with Krishna onto the battlefield. But do not imagine that everybody is a good warrior like Arjuna by default. Also, there is a difference between Karna and Arjuna. Both are good warriors. The difference is that one is surrendered to the Divine, has faith and is obedient to what the Divine wants.

It is so important that Sri Aurobindo speaks about obedience many times. He says there is no surrender without obedience. And actually, if you look at it, what is the meaning of saying "I surrender myself, but I'll do things my own way"? It is a paradox; it is a contradiction. Sri Aurobindo speaks of that and then He says, '*if he is frank with himself and straightforward to the Mother ...*'.² Being frank with oneself is to be honest, mentally honest. One of the first things that one must learn, even as an adolescent, is not to say, "I am wonderful" – but not to depreciate also. One has to be frank: "Yes, I have this difficulty". But do not be harsh on oneself, for the Divine has so ordained our life that He will make sure that there are people around us who will make us see what we do not want to see and people whom we just cannot do away with.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

All spiritual disciplines say this: if there is somebody very critical of you near you, you are lucky, definitely more lucky than having a flatterer around you. There can be nothing more dangerous than having flatterers around: you will never discover anything about yourself. Rather, you will begin to live in a bubble and will always be looking for people who will justify you. Imagine how dangerous that can be! One will not only take drugs, but want people around who will say that it is cool. That is how peer pressure works. People will say, “Yes, why not? It’s my way. If you object to it, that’s your way. But this is my way”. There are people who come together because it strengthens their tendencies. The Mother has talked about the role of friends and friendship: “I have seen promising youngsters who lost their way and eventually destroyed themselves because of friendship”. Karna is one example from history; but there are many. When a friend justifies a tendency which is dark and dangerous, there can be nothing worse than that. So we have to be very careful in choosing friends.

Being ‘*straightforward to the Mother*’: What does it mean? We may wear very nice white ironed clothes on Darshan day, but she sees what is inside. We should be just as we are and tell her everything. But people often ask, “the Mother knows everything, so why should we tell her?” Well, the Mother knows everything, but when we tell her, it means we become conscious; otherwise she has to work to make us conscious and everybody who walked the path knows this. Just becoming conscious can be so painful, and it takes time just to accept and acknowledge. Sri Aurobindo says, ‘*he will begin to recognise the source and nature of the obstacle and will soon be on the direct road to correct and change it.*’¹ So, there are two things he is asking of us: to be mentally honest, which is the beginning of sincerity, to be frank with oneself, and to be straightforward to the Mother, and the rest will be taken care of. Then he speaks about certain kinds of ‘*posturing before others, ... claiming the part of a superior Sadhaka, one with greater knowledge and with occult powers*’.² These are all vanity, arrogance, disobedience and indiscipline.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

*‘This habit of disobedience and disregard of discipline is so strong that it does not always need to be deliberate; the response to it seems to be immediate, irresistible and instinctive’.*¹ One of the first things you learn in the Ashram is discipline. If your call is at 7:25, and if you go at 7:26 the gate is closed. It is a tutoring in discipline. Actually, one cannot be even a man if one is not disciplined. One suddenly meets someone who will bring out apparently the worst in you. That is the moment to catch. Not the other person, but yourself, but with no feeling of hurt and insult inside. This is *sadhana*. One may meditate – that is a different story – but still remain unchanged. So always there will be people who will help us by criticisms even though they are hurting themselves. He continues, *‘This constant indiscipline is a radical obstacle to the sadhana and the worst possible example to others,’*² and further talks about *‘Dissimulation and falsity of speech’.*³ It takes various forms, and then comes *‘A dangerous habit of constant self-justification’.* But, through all this, he reminds us: *‘whatever the difficulties of the nature, however long and painful the process of dealing with them, they cannot stand to the end against the Truth, if there is or if there comes in these parts, the true spirit, attitude and endeavour’.*⁴ That is why there should be endurance, faith and perseverance; ultimately, the Mother’s victory comes to the most persevering. Our endeavour is to recognise the difficulties and have a dynamic will to reject them. There was a person who went away from the Ashram and he would suddenly send telegrams to Sri Aurobindo, many times, saying that he has fallen again and again, and Sri Aurobindo would send a reassuring reply every time. As long as one is open, asking for help, help will be given.

Declaring ourselves as a gone case is the last trap of the devil, a pessimism. The Mother says in one of Her talks: “Why do you think you are a hopeless case or you are difficult or impossible? It is – I’m going to shock you – it is because you don’t have faith in the grace”. This is true, because if you had faith, you would persist, you would know that there is nothing impossible for the Divine grace. But we

1. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

give up and just continue on our way. Then the mind even brings in all kinds of theory: “I turned to the Divine but I can’t change; nobody can change me”. But the Divine can change anyone. But we have to persist, recognise and keep on exposing ourself to the light. *‘But if a sadhaka continues out of self-esteem and self-will or out of tamasic inertia to shut his eyes or harden his heart against the Light, so long as he does that, no one can help him’*.¹ The phrase ‘so long as he does that’ means that he can open up at any time.

And then he says, *‘This Yoga can only be done to the end by those who are in total earnest about it and ready to abolish their little human ego and its demands in order to find themselves in the Divine. It cannot be done in a spirit of levity or laxity; the work is too high and difficult, the adverse powers in the lower Nature too ready to take advantage of the least sanction or the smallest opening, the aspiration and tapasya needed too constant and intense. It cannot be done if there is a petulant self-assertion of the ideas of the human mind or willful indulgence of the demands and instincts and pretensions of the lowest part of the being, commonly justified under the name of human nature’*.²

Here he insists upon the change of human nature, and not to prolong its reign. This is very important for all of us living in this generation. *‘It cannot be done If you insist on “freedom” for your human mind and vital ego’*.³ But people have different standpoints. In India also we talk about freedom, but what is that freedom? Freedom of the Self: that is the fundamental freedom. If we are not free from the ego, if we are not free from desire, it is not freedom but ignorance. We are driven by the whiplash of these forces. We are slaves at the mercy of these forces and we believe we are free. As Sri Aurobindo says in his poem “Who”, “We are bound in our thoughts where we hold ourselves free.”⁴ After all, where do these thoughts come from? They come from all kinds of spaces and we do not even know what or where those spaces are; we do not have the power to master them.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

3. *Ibid.*

4. From “Who”, *Collected Poems*, p. 203.

That is my ‘freedom of thought’! Then there is my ‘freedom of speech’. “I can say anything and its consequence does not matter”; this is a very dangerous trend. So, first we must discover true freedom; all else will follow.

Sri Aurobindo says, at least for this yoga, what this ‘freedom’ cannot be: *‘All the parts of the human being are entitled to express and satisfy themselves in their own way at their own risk and peril, if he so chooses, as long as he leads the ordinary life. But to enter into a path of Yoga whose whole object is to substitute for these human things the law and power of a greater Truth and the whole heart of whose method is surrender to the Divine Shakti. and yet to go on claiming this so-called freedom which is no more than a subjection to certain ignorant cosmic Forces, is to indulge in a blind contradiction and to claim the right to lead a double life.’*¹

Ultimately, freedom in ignorance is that one refuses to surrender and wants to go on one’s own way; but then, one should not say “I’m doing yoga”. We must know what we are signing up for. It is so true for everything in life. Even in a country, can we say we would follow our own law? There is a law of the land, whether one likes it or not. One may complain, but as long as the law is there, one has to follow the way. I cannot go to the US and say I am going to drive on the left-hand side of the road, because that is how it is done in my country. Man cannot be free as long as he has not discovered the inner freedom; that is the message of Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Human Cycle*. Man will need the police, he will need the law, until he has discovered the true inner freedom. Now, whether he wants to discover it or not, whether he chooses to discover it or not, that is his choice. But this is the path, and Sri Aurobindo is very clear about it. That is why the task, the work undertaken by Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is tough.

We often ask, “Where is the supermind?” We have to look inside and see. Why don’t we see? Because we discover only the resistance, the doubts, and all kinds of waywardness. But that should not dishearten us. Again and again the Mother has said this: just recognise it, place it before the light and then walk the journey.

1. *Letters on Yoga*, Vol. 4, p. 155.

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo says,

Yes, there are happy ways near to God's sun;
But few are they who tread the sunlit path;
Only the pure in soul can walk in light.¹

Somebody asked, "What is meant by 'pure in soul'?" The soul is always pure, but it is when we are rolling in the mud of the lower nature we are not pure. Especially, the Mother has cautioned about speech, incontinence of speech, and the harm done by incontinence of speech and abusive language. Mastery of speech was so much emphasised at one point in time: You have to speak the truth, speak beautifully, powerfully. Draupadi was asked, "How can you be married to five husbands? You don't deserve to be an empress. You are a fallen woman." Then finally they said, "We are giving you a chance to state your viewpoint". After everybody has spoken, she replies. She does not shout, she does not get angry. She says only three short phrases, or rather one phrase of three short words. This is all that she said: "*Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah*" meaning 'Dharma protects those who protect it': "I know I am on the path of dharma. Even if all of you say things about me or against me, my dharma will protect me and defend me". What kind of faith that is! This is the kind of power we all must cultivate. That is how power comes in yoga. It is not by doing a kind of magic outwardly; the true magic is when these parts change within us.

The conclusion is that this whole world is a Kurukshetra, and each one has to fight his own battle within. Each one will have his own unique difficulty in the lower vital. Very often we see the difficulty of others, because we have blinders hiding our own, because theirs is not part of our difficulty. That is true. But we have to look into our own difficulty and not put blinders to cover it, but work on it. As we conquer it or as it is conquered in us with the help of the Divine grace, it will also help in making this difficulty less strong in the whole world. This is how a genuine *sadhak* or aspirant helps the world. By conquering something within, he helps the conquest of that problem in the whole world. By Swaraj, he extends the Samraj. By attaining Swaraj, he becomes the Samrat.

1. *Savitri*, p. 445.

Just one more thing, which is very important: the first step of yoga is to cultivate peace and equanimity. Meditation, experiences, ascension of consciousness, all kinds of things are there, but peace and equanimity are the first fundamental practice. Without that we cannot handle these lower vital difficulties. They will go away if there is peace and equanimity. The lower vital cannot breathe the atmosphere of peace, as they do not like it and want some exciting things. They do not know how many exciting things are going on inside. So individually and collectively, a zone of peace is one of the best safeguards against the constant intrusion of these forces. Practice of equanimity is the fundamental practice of yoga.

Q: How do we practice equanimity?

Practicing of equanimity is at three levels. At the level of the body, we have to adapt to the changes in the physical environment. Travel is one of the simple ways to get over it. We love our physical comfort zones. People from northern parts of India when they come to the southern parts are still looking for *samosas* and *aalu parotas*, and vice versa. Like that, we bother too much about weather conditions. If there is hot weather, we need an AC; we go on complaining that the weather is too bad. Why should our mind go on to the weather? That is not what is important. One should be so focused on the Divine that nothing else should matter. The Mother has described one of her experiences: She was walking on the road and a tram car was coming and she did not even notice it; she was focused on the Divine, so the accident was averted. It is not even a practice: be focused on the Divine and nothing else matters. At the physical level, we all try to avoid physical discomfort. The bed may be very comfortable, even too comfortable, but it cannot give sleep to somebody who is fond of sleeping on a thin mattress. Either way, it should be like sleeping on the Divine's lap. This is equanimity at the physical level.

Then there is equanimity at the vital level. Joys and sorrows (*sukha dukeshu*), failures and successes, gains and losses: for all these, our vital part reacts. If somebody insults, let us not think in a way that when time comes we would do the same. That is not how a person

who is an aspirant towards yoga should react. In fact, very often, people who are always very angry are actually objects of pity. I am sorry to use this phrase; it is a deprecatory term. But imagine what their private world would be like. They are like snakes, always hiding inside, which is terrible. So, let us not be affected by the touches of external nature, by the touches, comments of people and insults. When somebody wrote to the Mother, “Mother, I feel insulted”, she replied, “the soul is never insulted, the ego feels insulted.” Many times, you can catch yourself and see “Oh, this is a play of the ego”; so you can turn it away and bring out a greater, more generous behavior. But it does not mean one is much above criticism. Sometimes one may hear a genuine criticism. Then it is good to understand, and you will be happy that you have discovered some defect in your nature to which you were blind. So, not getting affected by happiness and sorrow, success and failure, gain and losses, and not reacting towards them, is equanimity at the vital level.

Then comes equanimity at the mental level. We may think, “My viewpoint alone covers the whole of life”, but that is not how life is. Many flowers will bloom in the garden and at the same time serpents also live there. There should be a difference drawn between flowers blooming in a garden and serpents; that one should know. Serpents also have their own place, nothing wrong with that; that also one should know. I can give you one example. Some people talk about Sri Aurobindo’s yoga and combine all kinds of things like holding meditation classes, holding guided imagery, everything. It is perfectly fine, there are so many ways of doing things, even paid courses, whatever it is. It is each one’s freedom, but do not say those are Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is Sri Aurobindo’s yoga; we have read about it. It is not that anything and everything is Sri Aurobindo’s yoga; anything and everything is not even yoga. Guided imagery is very good, but we cannot use the word ‘yoga’. Some people say, “I don’t want to surrender to the Divine Mother but I am into Sri Aurobindo’s yoga”. Somebody wrote to Sri Aurobindo, “X is a great devotee, but he does not believe in the Mother, what do you have to say?” Sri Aurobindo’s replied, “then whose devotee is he if he doesn’t believe in the Divine Mother?” Nobody is compelling anyone to believe, but this is the way of the yoga, and you cannot

help it; you cannot play it both ways. If this is the yoga you have chosen, then that is the path.

I can tell you one practice that I had done for a long time and still am doing; whenever there is something amiss, I do this practice. All of us grow up with certain ideas. In my adolescence, like everybody, I used to think a lot about things and write a lot about what things are, how things are. Then when I started reading Sri Aurobindo, every time I found something that contradicts my thought, I said to myself, “drop your idea; accept what he says and now try to understand it”, because I may not have understood why Sri Aurobindo is saying so. But then I had a conviction that Sri Aurobindo is right. If the Mother has said something, it is right. But then I needed to understand. I may not have understood when I read it, but invariably the understanding will come sooner or later; sometimes like flashes it would come. The whole thing would become clear: why he has said so. Another approach is having one’s own views on the subject, and there is nothing wrong with it. But then that is not yoga. Yoga is to unite with the Divine, and, to me, they [the Mother and Sri Aurobindo] are representing the Divine. It is true that I may misunderstand her writings, but to avoid that I have to open myself and pray, “Mother, I don’t understand what you are saying, help me to understand” and there will be a moment when like a flash it will come. Then you see the compassion, the love, behind whatever she has said. This is how one has to practice.

“My thoughts”, “my views” are all a play of the ego. Where is the seat of the ego? It is in the mind just as the seat of desire is in the vital. The mind will not let go of “my own thinking” and if it cannot let go, there is no spiritual consciousness, because spiritual consciousness transcends the mind. It is the mastery of the mind by the spiritual consciousness – the mind’s views, opinions, standpoints – that maketh a spiritual being, just as mastery of the vital by the mind maketh a mental being. So, it is a long process, and one has to catch the key somewhere. Especially with the mind it is very difficult because we are identified with it, and instinctively we believe “my way of life is right”. We all have grown up with certain traditions; we have grown up in a certain way of life. Since I have grown up as a pure vegetarian, eating meat is a taboo. But when I read the Mother

and Sri Aurobindo, I understood that one can eat meat; the Mother says so. Then slowly the deeper truth reveals: do not link up vegetarianism with yoga. There are people who are vegetarians who may be far from yoga; vegetarianism is not equal to yoga. The emphasis should be on yoga, and these things will drop off. When they have to drop off – and one can put an effort to drop them off – the mind will hold on to its opinions, viewpoints, and thereby lose the chance. That is why whenever we have people who contradict us, they, in a way, help us. The Mother says that when you win a debate, you have lost an opportunity to widen, to understand a viewpoint. All this is a constant process; that is why yoga is happening all the time. In this yoga there is no respite, or rather the respite is in Her. Stay in Her and go through all this, the battle of life.

There are the practices of indifference and a stoic attitude. We can be indifferent towards things which frankly do not concern us: how somebody is, what he is doing, with whom he is staying. How do these things concern us? Will it help us in finding the Divine? If not, it does not matter. And then another practice is stoic attitude. When there are touches of nature which you cannot bear, you should have fortitude; we can develop that. And then, of course, resignation to the Divine Will. Life brings all kinds of things to us. And sometimes the mental viewpoints can be contradictory. Some people come to me and say, “Oh, I will never take medicine”. I ask, “Why?”, and they reply, “Because I have to find a self-healing method”. But if you are not willing to take medicine, do not go to a doctor; then you accept whatever comes. You cannot play both ways. The simple way is to take medicine and be open to the Divine Mother. Or you can discover a way of self-healing. All these are options. But the mind will have ideas, opinions. It makes a religion of ‘no religion’. It makes a fetish of being liberal. It becomes intolerant of intolerance in others. See the paradox that the mind enjoys! Some of the most intolerant people are those who hold this view that you should be tolerant. When we go past the mind, then we can detect these mind games. There are plenty of games that the mind plays. You can detect the deceptions, the covers, the shams. And almost unknowingly, mechanically, unconsciously, habitually, we put up a show, a facade which is going to impress others, an appearance. All these things

yoga will tear off. Because they are veils behind which the beloved is hidden. And the beloved does not like veils; it is as simple as that.

And the strong foundation of yoga is peace. Call peace; it is a fundamental practice. The basis of peace is the Divine presence. Put in a simple way, if the Mother is everywhere, there is no reason to be disturbed. The moment you feel a little disturbance, get back to Her, dwell in Her. If she is there with you, how can you have any disturbance?

This is how yoga proceeds: It is an inner battle and a pilgrimage.

Q: When one is here in Auroville, consciously or not, and, since the Mother has said “Auroville is the ‘cradle of Superman’” irrespective of whether they have chosen consciously or not, they are doing yoga, correct?

Very clearly the Mother has directly answered all these things. Consciously or unconsciously, yoga is going on everywhere. But the ‘cradle of superman’ is not equivalent to a superman. A child in the cradle would become a hero or a saint, but also would become a robber or a murderer. There are many slips between the cup and the lip. He is in the cradle. The cradle is not automatic. He has to grow up, and you know the dangers of growing up. And that is why turning to the Mother, opening to the Mother is very important, and to believe that automatically it would happen is absurd.

Another statement of this is in the Charter of Auroville. One has to just follow the Charter, but how do you follow the Charter without undertaking yoga? How are you going to be a willing servitor of the Divine without engaging in yoga? And this yoga has a way and a process. All yoga has a way and a process. One cannot live life like cats and dogs and say, “I am engaged in yoga because I am in the Ashram” or in Auroville or anywhere. It does not work like that. The Mother has said very clearly that very few are really engaged in yoga. For the Ashram she said something interesting. Someone asked, “What are the others here for?” and she said, “To give those who are engaged in yoga the experience of the world”; it is necessary for the yoga. The yoga is done by those who are meant to do yoga, and they will do it anywhere. The others, they may be in the Ashram,

Auroville, Society, a center or anywhere else, they will not do yoga because they do not have the call. Yet they are drawn for a different reason. People in this world are drawn to wherever they are; there is an occult arrangement, as the Mother put it, why people are where they are. They may represent the resistance of the world, for example. The old world of the mind must give way to the intuitive world, and the mind does not let go of its hegemony. It believes in mental methods: debate, discussion, democracy, all the processes which are going to go.

Once I had a little exchange with someone and he said, “How does it matter? Let it take seven hundred years.” I said, “Yes, it does not matter”, but that is only one way of seeing. “Let the world collapse, how does it matter?”: this is one approach; people take it. But what is the way one must follow? The way is to become more and more one with the Divine Will.

Q: What is the hope for the future?

It is spiritual evolution, but not with the idea of becoming a superman or a supramental being or a yogi and all these things. As Sri Aurobindo has mentioned in his letters, if a person aims for all that, it means that the person is moved by the ego aggrandising itself. What is yoga about? It is to live in the Divine, for the Divine, by the Divine. That is what supermanhood is. There is no other supermanhood. A superman is somebody who is the humblest of the humble. Why? Because he is living in the Divine. He does not disdain anything.

Thou who pervadest all the worlds below,
Yet sitst above,
Master of all who work and rule and know,
Servant of Love!

Thou who disdainest not the worm to be
Nor even the clod,
Therefore we know by that humility
That thou art God.¹

1. Sri Aurobindo, “God”, *Collected Poems*, p. 218.

When we read Sri Aurobindo, what he has spoken about the superman, we see that the superman is somebody who gives himself freely to creation out of his love for God. Superman is somebody who is moved by the will of God to do his work in the world. Superman is he who rules to serve, who is a servant of God, lover of God, knower of God. He has no more any personal selfish interest or desire. He is not representing a political party; he is not representing a country; he is not representing a way of life; he is not representing any of the mental ideals. He may say, “This approach is more aligned to the Mother’s way” and he is happy with it, but not because he is attached to that particular way. All these other things have nothing to do with superman.

After all, who will take to this yoga? One who has discovered the insufficiency of mental methods. If we believe that mental methods, debates, discussions can solve the problems of mankind, well, let us continue for another 500 years. The danger is, as Sri Aurobindo says in his poem, “A Dream of Surreal Science”,

A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The universe before God had time to shout.¹

At one level you can say you will live in that vastness till another *pralaya*, but that is not what we want. We do not understand the brink on which we are standing and how important it is for mankind even to survive, to take up the yoga and grow, to take this curve of spiritual evolution. People do not realise how dangerous they are making the earth by wanting man to continue with the old ideas, old methods, old ways which have become outdated. A cradle is okay, but there is a whole journey from cradle to superman.

One does not become a superman by reading a book on superman or picking up the phrase. There are people who pick up *Record of Yoga* and say, “You know, I am practicing this”. But Sri Aurobindo never gave this for practice. It was his diary. It was not even published till after 1972. In SABCL, the earlier edition of Sri Aurobindo’s collected works, this book is not there; it has come later on. What was the text for practice that he has given to us? *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Perhaps

1. Sri Aurobindo, “A Dream of Surreal Science”, *Collected Poems*, p. 614.

Record of Yoga appeals to some readers because it does not ask you to surrender to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The Mother says that ambition, arrogance of the mind hides behind many convenient excuses, such as ‘freedom’ of the mind. Why does it hide? Because, she says, ultimately behind it is that arrogance that does not want to surrender. And then what may happen is a different thing altogether. But we should not mistake apples for oranges. Yoga is yoga. Nothing more, nothing less. But Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is not even a yoga in the traditional sense; it is a way of life where one has to have the spirit of the warrior.

Q: From the ultimate truth or the ultimate yoga point, from the Advaita (non-duality) point, the human mind itself is an illusion. There is only the Divine Truth. So, to whom do we surrender? They say it is all one.

There is one school of *Advaita* which does not accept the ultimate reality of the individual but accepts a practical reality, *vyavaharik*, as Shankara’s followers would put it. Now, in that case, there is an issue: Since there is only one reality and none other, then yoga, honestly, is superfluous. There is no individual reality. So who is doing the yoga? and why does he do the yoga? It creates a problem, it puzzles more than solves the puzzle. There are people who live like that, with the idea that “I will do anything I want to, because there is no ‘I’, there is no doer”. People have interpreted even the *Gita* like that: “I can kill anyone because there is no I”. This is one kind of extreme *Advaita*, which obviously seems, to me, philosophically unsound or incomplete. There is another school of *Advaita* which has tried to bridge the gap: *Vishishtadvaita* and *Dvaita*. It says that there is a reality of the individual soul; it is something which is immortal but only till it reaches a point where it can merge into the ultimate reality. This also creates a problem because then the whole journey becomes meaningless: to say that after all the travel through the aeons, the end is where you began. This again leaves a question mark.

Now, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the reality of the individual soul as a means to fulfill the Divine in creation. In that view, creation is not a *Maya* but a *Lila*; the meaning of *Lila* is the unfolding of the Divine, the manifestation of the Divine. In this manifestation, there

are three terms: one is the transcendent who is the ultimate; second is the cosmos through which the Divine manifests himself through the dual terms of cosmic knowledge and cosmic ignorance (in both the ways he is expressing himself); and the third is the individual. All these three are required for the divine manifestation. Obviously if there is no Transcendent, there is no manifestation because everything unrolling by itself does not make sense; because there is nothing which is beyond to manifest. We understand that the cosmos is there but if there is no individual then again it makes no sense. The individual soul is the point through which the Transcendent is expressing himself and the cosmos is impacting the individual and the individual is impacting the cosmos. Then it becomes not only a practical reality, but even our intuitive sense will tell us it is that, because we experience at least an ego individuality and an apparent reality of the creation. But we have to discover the True being within us and the True cosmic being who is hidden behind the cosmos, behind the apparent surfaces, the reality which is expressing itself in the cosmos, and of course we have to be connected with the Transcendent. Yoga is discovering this triple unity within. This was the original mysticism in Christianity: the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, which got lost unfortunately in religious symbols and cults.

This is how Sri Aurobindo's view differs from non-dualism. Non-dualism does not give you a field of action ultimately. You may govern yourself morally because it is more practical. That is the practical aspect, but it does not make sense of the 'Creation'. Transcending the mind is perfectly fine, but annulling the universe as non-dualism is not fine. Absolutely one has to transcend the mind. All spiritual life implies transcending the mind, discovering the non-dual. Yes, it is true that there is One Reality. But the next part is "How do I act?" "How do I be?" "Is there a purpose in existence, in my life?" And that is where Sri Aurobindo's teaching becomes relevant.

Q: Will it not be easier if we accept that we are divine beings living a humanised life instead of humans living a divinised life?

If there is strength in this idea, for some people it may work. But, more often than not, what happens is that people see only one aspect of it. Actually, there are two sides of it. Ravan picked up 'Soham

asmi, meaning ‘I am that’, but you have to simultaneously say ‘Tat twam asi’, ‘you are also that’. Otherwise, it creates a problem. One has to live both, discover that reality by the power of meditating on the idea, and not just by accepting it in the background.

One can discover the One Reality within oneself and in the creation. In this yoga you also continue with the world, and as you grow you integrate. That is how Sri Aurobindo used the words ‘ascent’ and ‘integration’. Otherwise, when one discovers That Reality – there are means to discover it – one abandons the world, and it is very difficult to come back because nothing is ready. People who discover it that way, they eventually withdraw because they realise that they have gone far and wide and if they enter into the world and its play, they are perplexed or they lose their way because it is so difficult. In this yoga you arrive at the non-dual also, but at the same time, you take the world along through the path of works. That is why Karma Yoga is so important as the wide path of entry, so that your instrument is also developing; you are engaged with the world and at the same time you are discovering the One, the *Sachchidananda*, beyond all dualities.

An Appeal

Savitri Bhavan is very grateful for the generous support from all *Savitri*-lovers and well-wishers who made Savitri Bhavan’s work throughout the past 25 years possible.

As for now, our monthly regular budget amounts to nearly Rs.3.5 lakhs. This amount is needed for the maintenance of the buildings, events and activities, publications, the creation of learning aids, equipment purchases, as well as staff maintenances.

We are expecting an increase of about Rs.1.5 lakhs every month, an expenditure not only due to general cost increases but to the cutting back of staff maintenances from the central fund of Auroville.

We are appealing to all well-wishers in India and around the world to continue supporting the work of Savitri Bhavan by *regular monthly contributions* according to their means.

“History of Savitri Bhavan” (youtube.com)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY39ImUKnQs>

Finitude and Infinity: in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, in the Mother's Writings and in Science

Dr. Frieder Herb

Introduction

How does the infinite enter our consciousness? Does the infinite exist at all? These questions lead us out of our everyday thinking into a world of higher consciousness. This article attempts to provide answers as to how Sri Aurobindo uses the concept of infinity in his work *Savitri*, how the Mother applies it and what today's realisation in natural science says about it.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

Savitri by Sri Aurobindo is an epic poem that tells the story of Savitri and her quest for truth and transformation. The narrative follows Savitri on her journey from human existence to the highest spiritual enlightenment. She conquers death to save her beloved Satyavan, thereby unveiling the spiritual truth about life and immortality. *Savitri* is a profound philosophical book on the pursuit of higher consciousness and spiritual illumination.

Infinity as Contradictions

“In a small corner of infinity” (p. 161)

The images of infinity Sri Aurobindo evokes in the lines of *Savitri* are full of humour and contradiction. In everyday consciousness there is no finite corner in infinity. Sri Aurobindo uses this image to illustrate that we are only catching a very small fraction of the truth of living in the consciousness of authentic light.

“The diameter of infinity was drawn,” (p. 270)

Neither can you draw the diameter of infinity nor measure the “distant arc of the unseen heights,” which is the next phrase in *Savitri*. This contradiction seems to confuse us in the same way as the dates of “the birth and death of the worlds” are fixed in the previous sentence.

The “Godheads of the Greater Mind” could draw the diameter of infinity and seemed to know all “that in all time could be”. Sri Aurobindo used the verb ‘seemed’, because Savitri came and changed the date of death. Our higher consciousness seems to have the total truth, but for that we have to go above, which Sri Aurobindo defines as the true consciousness, the supramental.

“Infinity’s finite fronts she lived in, ...” (p. 671)

This line describes infinity as having a finite front, or rather infinity as an attribute of the finite: an infinite finite front. It could not be more contradictory. This balancing act of contradictions stimulates our consciousness and moves us from finite to infinite thinking.

“The finite self mated with infinity.” (p. 25)

For Sri Aurobindo it was clear that the finite and the infinite belong together, just as the limited mind has become a limitless light in the previous sentence. Later in this article we will see that infinity is a description of the Divine. Our body is finite and if it is to become Divine, the body must mate with infinity.

“Making a finite of infinity;” (p. 84) “And make the finite one with Infinity.” (p. 72)

Now, for Sri Aurobindo there is no doubt that the finite comes from the infinite, as the above two lines in *Savitri* show. The most interesting part of the first sentence comes before the line “Making a finite out of infinity”. In this case, “Her will shaping the undetermined vasts” means that the soul has the willpower to shape in the vast the finite. Therefore, our willpower, combined with our imagination, is very important. Of course, in our daily consciousness it is a contradiction to make something finite with infinity. But the deep belief of Sri Aurobindo is that everything comes from the Divine, from Oneness.

“Let thy infinity in one body live,” (p. 345)

This phrase is spoken by the heart of Aswapati, the father of Savitri. It is a wish that the Divine live in one body, All-Knowledge in one mind of Light and All-Love in one human heart. Why does he mention one body, one mind and one human heart in this sentence? Because, one person can change the date of death, and that is Savitri.

“While there, one is one’s own infinity.” (p. 32)

What a beautiful contradiction we see here! “One” is infinity, how can we imagine that? Most scientists think that “one” is the opposite of infinity, so it shows really the great humour of Sri Aurobindo to write the sentence like that. Of course, if we look deeper into *Savitri*, we have to ask what he meant by it. There is a space, a “silent self where the world was not”. In our Higher Self we are the infinity of our own, we are part of the Divine.

“Only when infinity weds the finite’s thought,” (p. 516)

When Sri Aurobindo says “only”, then we know it is important and it means “only”. Man can “be free from himself and live with God” – as the following line in *Savitri* says – only when infinity is part of our finite thought. Sri Aurobindo was pragmatic: when we live on earth we have to consider the circumstances on earth. Therefore, our thoughts have to combine the material and the divine worlds.

“Where zero held infinity in its sum” (p. 100)

In principle, zero cannot unite infinity as a sum in our daily consciousness. But what is zero? Today, as we know, in our universe zero does not exist. In the spaces between the galaxies there is a vacuum energy, which means every moment a particle and anti-particle can be created as a common togetherness and disappear. Now, if we understand that “All and Nothing were a single term”, the following sentence in *Savitri*, Nothing includes everything, just like in our universe there is the formation and decay of particles in a vacuum.

“That is a passage to infinity.” (p. 260) “And more and more spread into infinity.” (p. 554)

Have you ever heard that there is a way to infinity? Of course not; how can we go to infinity? The question is, what is “That” in the sentence? Now, when the divine enters our narrow space of mind, the divine escapes into the vastness at every place. Exactly, this is a passage to infinity. The second line quoted above describes the same topic. When we move to a consciousness that is not limited by the walls and gates of the body, and where there is a circle without circumference, then we move more and more into infinity.

Infinity as Soul, God and Transformation

“Her soul stood close to the founts of the infinite.” (p. 671) “Infinity put on a finite soul,” (p. 101) “And fills a little soul with the Infinite;” (p. 177)

For Sri Aurobindo, infinity is important in relation to the soul and the Divine. The soul is finite but filled with the infinite. Our way into the soul is to allow the infinite to enter and to attune the finite to the infinite.

“A point that disappears in the infinite, —” (p. 696)

In the first and only canto of “The Book of Everlasting Day” is described how a soul dissolves in the boundless sea of all souls. If the soul never returns to earth and the pilgrim soul's journey is complete, it is like a point disappearing into infinity. How beautiful is that description!

“And make the heart wide as infinity” (p. 235)

Of course, the heart cannot be as wide or as joyful as infinity. For integral yoga, it is very important to bring wideness and delight into our heart and mind.

“And we break into the infinity of God.” (p. 24)

In this line in *Savitri*, it quickly becomes clear that infinity is a part of the Divine.

“Infinity’s centre, a Face of rapturous calm” (p. 4) and “Coercing the freedom of infinity” (p. 40)

For Sri Aurobindo, infinity has a quality of rapturous calm, which is in itself a contradiction, and freedom. These are qualities of the Divine.

“And feels around her infinity’s embrace.” (p. 177) “And unaware of his own infinity.” (p. 385)

The Infinity is around us and embraces us; it is like how God is described in the Bible or other religions. In our daily consciousness we are not aware of the divine or of our own divine personality.

“Tuning the finite to infinity.” (p. 30) and “Infinity takes up the finite’s acts” (p. 154)

In the end, everything will be infinitely divine. This is the deep belief of Sri Aurobindo described in his book *The Life Divine*. Our task is to tune ourselves to the divine, or for scientific people, to transform the finite into the infinite. Of course, it is not an easy task; one should tune oneself, like in music, to find harmony and beauty.

Infinity as Space in the Universe

“A space that is its own infinity.” (p. 298) and “It spreads beyond the expanding universe;” (p. 261)

Sri Aurobindo played with various scientific ideas of his time which are contained in many lines of *Savitri*. He realised that space is infinite and the universe is expanding in this infinite space. For him, infinity had not only a divine meaning, but also a scientific reality in which we live.

Infinity in the Mother’s Writings

“Now in the heart of action the vital being has discovered the perception of Infinity and Eternity. It can perceive Thy Supreme Beauty and live it in all sensations and all forms.” (CWM I, *Prayers and Meditations*, 1916)

“Without any personal thought or will, I let myself be cradled passively by Thy infinity.” (CWM I, *Prayers and Meditations*, 1917)

“All principle of individuality is overpassed, she is plunged in Thy infinity that allows oneness to be realised in all domains without confusion, without disorder.” (CWM I, *Prayers and Meditations*, 1914)

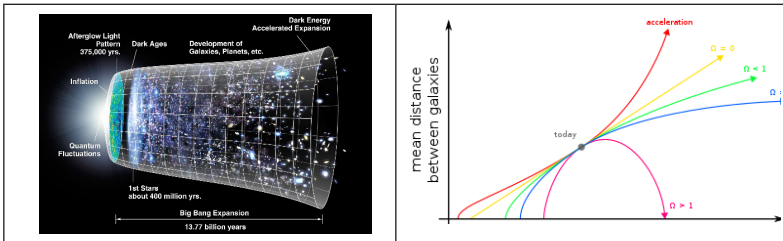
“In the perfect silence of my contemplation all widens to infinity, and in the perfect peace of that silence Thou appearest in the resplendent glory of Thy Light.” (CWM I, *Prayers and Meditations*, 1914)

For the Mother, infinity is something we can experience in meditation. Infinity and eternity are synonyms for her. Infinity is useful for realising Oneness when we enter into it. This is how she recognises what infinity means for us humans and our consciousness.

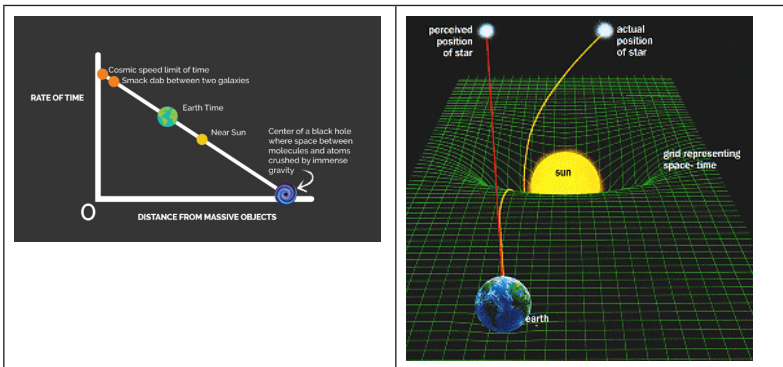
Infinity in Physics

Everything on earth, including life and matter, is finite. Therefore, our focus must be on the infinity of the universe. According to today’s

conception, the universe itself was created from the Big Bang. It has a certain expansion and mass, which physicists were able to determine with the help of the Hubble telescope. The big question that concerns us is the space around the universe. Newton postulated an infinite absolute space. However, Einstein recognised that space is dependent on matter and is influenced by mass. One could therefore assume that without mass there is no space and therefore no question of what space looks like outside our universe. The universe is expanding through its galaxies, lights and gravitational waves, creating new space like a balloon filled with air. Our universe today is of a known size and is expanding faster and faster, potentially to infinity. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo describes in his work *Savitri*.

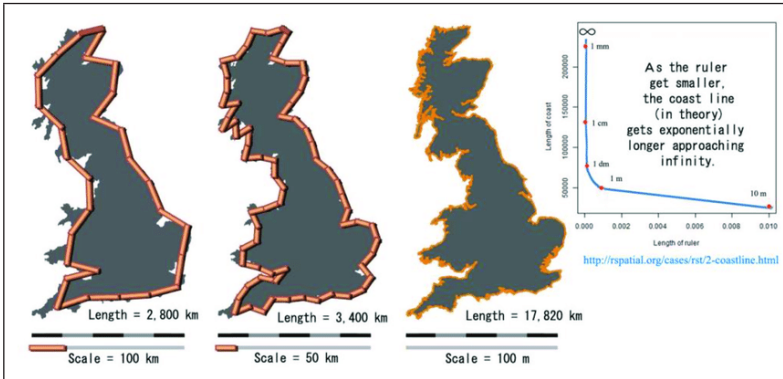


Of course, the idea of a finite universe expanding ever further into infinity is a contradiction. To this day, it remains a challenge to fully understand the full extent and nature of the apparent contradictions in physics.



It should be noted that time and space, which we understand today as infinitely expandable quantities, are not independent of us and matter,

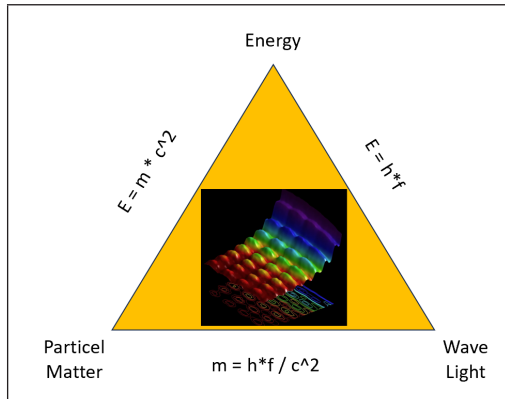
but are strongly influenced. For example, if you live near a black hole, time passes very slowly. A well-known observation concerns space: during a solar eclipse, a star was discovered that should have been behind the sun. Due to the curvature of space described by Einstein, it was suddenly possible to see that star, because light always takes the most direct path.



The question is, do we live on earth without infinity? Is everything finite and therefore nothing divine? It is not an easy question, especially in physics. A physicist has discovered that the coastline of Great Britain has a certain length if you measure it on a scale of 100 kilometres. If you halve this scale, the length becomes greater. This can be taken further and further. If you look at the function that describes how the length develops by changing the scale, you can immediately see that the length goes towards infinity. Fortunately, this has no significance for everyday life. This is because in the last century, people settled on a standard metre as a yardstick, which made things comparable. Nevertheless, the contradiction remains. We can define an area, but the perimeter of the area tends to become infinite due to the fractal dimensions and Heisenberg uncertainty principle.

Contradictions in Physics

There are many contradictions in physics. One of the most significant is the wave-particle duality. Louis de Broglie and the development of quantum mechanics have shown that this duality applies not only to light, but to all matter.



With Einstein, Plank and Louis de Broglie, matter can be mathematically converted into energy or into a wavelength, in all directions.

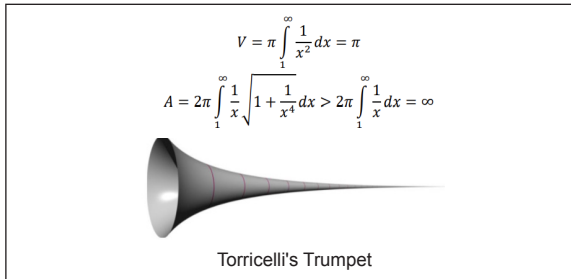
Physicists tend to describe matter as simply as possible and with as little effort as possible. This is why physicists have adopted the interpretation that, depending on the experiment and the light or wave properties of matter, either wave or particle properties are found. However, nature is not as simple as our minds would like it to be. A few years ago, a research team in Switzerland discovered in an experiment that matter can have both wave and particle properties at the same time. This contradiction also appears in the lines of *Savitri*, and Sri Aurobindo describes light as a strange combination of wave and particle. The humour and the suggestion of all these contradictions in *Savitri* are just an attempt to leave our simple thinking behind. If we take the findings in physics seriously, we live in a world of contradictions. We can only leave this world of contradictions by expanding our consciousness more and more towards infinity.

Infinity in Mathematics

Without infinity, maths would only be half as valuable. The importance of infinity in mathematics cannot be overestimated. Both Leibniz and Newton used the infinity symbol in their calculations. These infinitesimal calculations changed the world, because it was only through them that we were able to describe phenomena in nature approximately and determine the hidden laws.

Georg Cantor discovered that infinity in mathematics is not the same as infinity in other sciences. He was the first to show that the

natural numbers are infinite. Since the rational numbers are countable with the natural numbers, they are also infinite. When he turned his attention to the real numbers, i.e. all numbers with a decimal point, he realised that these are not countable and therefore represent a greater infinity than the natural numbers. He managed to show that infinity is not always synonymous with 'infinity', but that there are distinctions in mathematics.

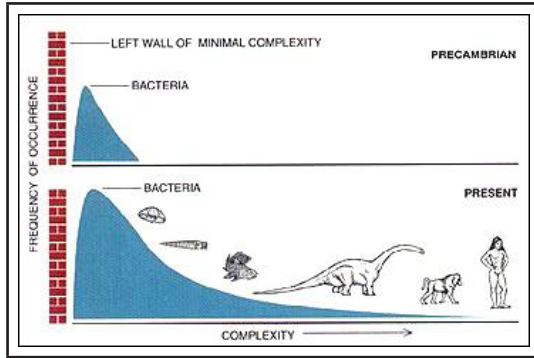


Even the maths is not without contradictions. The Torricelli Trumpet has a finite volume and an infinite surface area. This realisation immediately brings to mind the coastline of Great Britain, which is also infinite, but its surface area is finite.

Infinity in Evolution

Firstly, let's look at biology. All species on earth are countable and although we probably do not know them all yet, they are finite. Species change over time through evolution. It can therefore be assumed that change is infinite as long as there is life, since time is also infinite. An important question is whether humans will also evolve. For Sri Aurobindo it is clear that humans will evolve to superman (see *The Life Divine*, pp. 999-1050).

There is still no indication of how the further development of living beings on Earth will unfold. We can only recognise that the development of living beings has expanded to ever greater complexity. If we take into account the social and consciousness development of humans, we can say with certainty that the speed of development has increased.



Summary

To summarise: We live in a world full of contradictions, and the existence of the infinite as finite is addressed here. Both aspects are dealt with in Sri Aurobindo's work *Savitri* and encourage us to think beyond them. A purely material and physical description of the Earth and the universe is not enough to resolve the contradictions. We need a consciousness that goes beyond everyday thinking in order to perceive things and leave them there. We can recognise that there are greater connections than we understand today. Let us tune from the finite to the infinite in our thoughts, emotions and bodies.

About the Author

Dr. Frieder Herb was born in Pforzheim in 1970. He is married to Kerstin Bunte and lives in Kirchheim unter Teck near Stuttgart in Germany. He studied physics in Berlin and received his doctorate in Ulm on the ageing of batteries and fuel cells. He worked for more than 20 years in electric vehicle research at Mercedes and for the last two years in research & development at KYBURZ in Zurich.

Eckhard Karnasch brought him and his wife to the Ashram in 2001. Since then he and his wife have travelled to Puducherry every year. The silence and intense atmosphere of Golconde, Samadhi and Matrimandir attract them both. In the early years of his visit to the Ashram, he had no idea of the depths of *Savitri*. Slowly, through constant repetition and Shradhdhavan's readings at Savitri Bhavan on Sundays, his understanding and enthusiasm for the content grew. His scientific understanding and his inner relationship with the Ashram and Auroville give an interesting view of *Savitri*.

Argentina Group is Reading *Savitri* in Spanish

Paola Raingo

The first time I learned of the existence of this wonderful poem was through Satprem's book, *The Adventure of Consciousness*. There I also learned that Sri Aurobindo was essentially a poet. At that time the poem did not yet have a translation into Spanish, so my reading could not go beyond the first pages. After several years, the Spanish version came into our hands and almost spontaneously the intention to read it in its entirety arose. The first complete reading of the text arose through a WhatsApp group of Teacher Trainers of the Buenos Aires Yoga Association. We began this first reading in times of social isolation due to COVID, and we completed it in February 2022.

After some time, in a talk with a student (Juliana Tedesco), I shared how enriching it had been to read the complete poem, and how the companionship (that is, receiving a passage every day in the group chat) had made it possible for many people to complete the reading, without failing in the attempt. So we decided to replicate the experience, always with the intention that more people can read it. For that reason, this time the invitation was for an open group of people, who were simply interested in receiving a passage of the poem each day on their cell phone, until the reading was completed. For this reading we decided, in addition to the verbatim copy of the passage, to accompany the submission with an audio file in which the passage was read aloud. Every day we send a fragment that takes approximately three minutes to read. At present we are about to finish reading Part One of the poem. Currently the group for this second reading has 47 Spanish-speaking readers.

Savitri is a complete source of teachings (The Mother said that everything is in *Savitri*). On the level of content, one finds in it a poetic expression that helps us to feel, intuit and know all the possibilities of human experience. And beyond the plane of what is intellectually understandable, *Savitri* communicates by vibration, becoming an experience of spiritual joy, with the mantric power of the Word.

News from Savitri Bhavan

October 2023 – February 2024

Regular weekly events

1. ‘**The Dream Divine**’ is a project started in March 2023 with the aim to help newcomers to Auroville learn and understand the ideals of Auroville, about the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the basics of Integral Yoga. The sessions, which include talks, presentations and screening of videos, are held every Wednesday from 4.30 pm to 5.30 pm.

2. ‘**Ritam**’ is a group led by Barbara, meeting every Friday 9 am to 11 am. This is a closed group-work concentrating on reading *Mother’s Agenda* and playing the related *Savitri* lines to the accompaniment of Sunil-da’s music.

3. **Bases of Yoga – the Mother’s Talks** – An Interactive Book Reading Circle, every Saturday 10 am to 11 am. Started on 18 November 2023. Facilitator: Debashish

4. **Savitri Study Circle** – Reading and commentary of Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, every Sunday 10:30 am to 12 pm. Facilitator: Larry Seidlitz. Livestreamed on Youtube; past sessions also available

October 2023

4 ‘The Dream Divine’ Series – Interview with Aster Patel by Narad: a recorded video

11 ‘The Dream Divine’ Series – ‘About Savitri Bhavan’ & ‘Finding the Psychic Being – an Exhibition by Loretta’: two recorded videos

- 18 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Life Education Centre' & 'STEM Land at Udavi and Isaiambalam Schools': recorded video presentations
- 25 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'On The Mother's Symbol' by Tara-di & 'The Mother's Terrace Darshans (1965-1973)' by Sudha Sundaram: two short films
- 27 'Fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in *Savitri*': presentation series by Larry Seidlitz. Theme for the month: '*Ishwara-Shakti*'

November 2023

- 1 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Prosperity': talk by Dr. Alok Pandey
- 8 'The Dream Divine' Series – Video of an interview of Shraddhavan in the year 2013 by a Russian TV crew
- 15 'The Dream Divine' Series – A video on Aranya Forest & Sanctuary
- 22 'The Dream Divine' Series – Video of a conversation between Dr. Alok Pandey and Narad on 'The Mother's Mahasamadhi'
- 25 'Fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in *Savitri*': presentation series by Larry Seidlitz. Theme for the month: '*Realisation of the Spiritual Self*'
- 29 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Auroville, the Golden Bond – Towards Human Unity': a recorded video

December 2023

- 6 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'The Mother and Sri Aurobindo': a recorded presentation; 'The Mother on Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi, 5th December 1950': a video
- 13 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Serving the Construction of the Matrimandir': video of an interview of Gloria
- 20 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'The City the Earth Needs': a film produced by Aurovilians in 2014

- 22 Chanting of the entire *Bhagavad Gita* (from 6 am to 9.30 am) by a group of Aurovilians, to mark the occasion of *Gita* Jayanthi



- 25 Christmas celebration with a silent concentration in the Sangam Hall



- 27 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Christmas in Ashram': a recorded interview of Mona and Udar Pinto; 'The Mother's messages on Christmas': a video
- 29 'Fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in *Savitri*': presentation series by Larry Seidlitz. Theme for the month: '*The Hard Truth of the Mankind's Lower Nature*'

- 30 'Integral Yoga & Mathematics': an exploratory discussion led by Team Enlight



- 31 Gratitude for the year 2023 and Welcoming 2024: Midnight Meditation in Sangam Hall

January 2024

- 3 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Dealing with Vital Difficulties': talk by Dr. Alok Pandey, followed by a Q & A session
- 10 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'New Year Messages by The Mother' & 'Four Aspects of The Mother': two recorded videos
- 24 'The Dream Divine' Series – Video of an interview of Mirajyoti on 26.02.2014
- 26 'Fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in *Savitri*' presentation series by Larry Seidlitz. Theme for the month: *'The Divine Mother'*
- 31 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'The Mother and Flowers': A recorded talk by Richard Pearson

February 2024

- 6 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'East and West: a New Synthesis': talk by Dr. Alok Pandey reminiscing on the arrival of Sri Aurobindo back in India

- 7 International Conference on Revival and Promotion of Sanskrit in Auroville: Day 1 of the two-day conference was held at Savitri Bhavan, with the following schedule:
- ‘Sanskrit: A Living Tradition’ – Keynote address by Dr. David Frawley
 - ‘Sanskrit and the Society: Beyond the Politics of Language’ – Talk by Dr. Shonaleeka Kaul
 - ‘Future Directions for Sanskrit Revival’ – Talk by Dr. Girishnath Jha
 - ‘Sanskrit in Indian Cultural Heritage’ – Panel discussion led by Dr. Sampadananda Mishra, Dr. Vinay Chandra and Dr. Anuradha Chaudhry
 - ‘Sanskrit’s Role in Modern Education Systems’ – Talk by Dr. B. Mahadevan
 - ‘Yoga is not Yoga without Sanskrit’ – Talk by Dr. Anand Balyogi Bhavanani
 - ‘Sanskrit and Spiritual Enlightenment’ – Talk by Dr. Anuradha Chaudhry
- 8 ‘The Living Symbol of The Mother – The science and magic of colours’: a workshop led by Ilсур



- 9 'Stars in the Soup': a programme of poetry and music by Gordon. Reading of Shradhdhavan's poems interspersed with flute recital



- 14 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'Journey to *The Life Divine*': a recorded video presentation
- 21 The Mother's Chair placed for darshan in the Sangam Hall and a group meditation organised to mark Her 146th birthday



- 23 'Reflections on Passages in *Savitri*' presentation series by Larry Seidlitz. Theme for the month: 'What is Fate?'
- 28 'The Dream Divine' Series – 'The City of Dawn': a documentary film made in Auroville in 2014

The Dream of Savitri Bhavan

We dream of an environment in Auroville

that will breathe the atmosphere of Savitri

that will welcome Savitri lovers from every corner
of the world

that will be an inspiring centre of Savitri studies

that will house all kinds of materials and activities
to enrich our understanding and enjoyment of
Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic

that will be the abode of Savitri, the Truth that
has come from the Sun

We welcome support from everyone who feels that
the vibration of Savitri will help to manifest a better
tomorrow.

TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF SAVITRI BHAVAN

Savitri Bhavan is mainly dependent on donations, and all financial help from well-wishers is most welcome. Please help the dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality.

If you live in India

100% exemption is available for offerings from Indian taxpayers under section 35 (i) (iii) of the IT act.

By Cheque or DD: they should be made payable to **Auroville Unity Fund** and sent to the following address:

Savitri Bhavan, Auroville 605101,
Tamil Nadu, Phone +91 (0)413 262 2922.

By Bank Transfer: they should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund **Acc. No.** 10237876031 (80G or Ordinary Receipt) or Auroville Unity Fund **Acc. No.** 31612623238 (for 100% tax relief under SSR), **State Bank of India, Branch code** No. 0003160 **IFSC** code SBIN0003160 Auroville International Township. **Purpose:** “SAVITRI BHAVAN”. **Note: PAN Number is essential.** If you send an offering in this way, please inform Savitri Bhavan at the same time, so that a receipt can be sent as soon as possible.

If you live Abroad

To send your offering by **SWIFT** Transfer, please use the following details:

Auroville Foundation, Acc. No. 40106120526,
SWIFT code: SBININBB104, **IFSC code:** SBIN0000691,
State Bank of India, Branch code: 000691, New Delhi
Main Branch, 11 Sansad Marg, New Delhi 110 001, **Purpose**
“SAVITRI BHAVAN”.

For all correspondence and queries, please contact

Savitri Bhavan

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www.savitribhavan.org

Savitri
is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother