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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXII

No. 1

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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### CONTENTS

|                                                                                      |     |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| <i>Sri Aurobindo</i>                                                                 |     |    |
| SONGS TO MYRTILLA (Poem)                                                             | ... | 7  |
| TO HIS COUNTRYMEN, TO HUMANITY, TO THE NATION,<br>TO THE INDIVIDUAL, TO THE STUDENTS | ... | 13 |
| <i>The Mother</i>                                                                    |     |    |
| ‘IT IS FOR US . . . TO ASPIRE’                                                       | ... | 17 |
| LETTERS TO A YOUNG SADHAK                                                            | ... | 18 |
| <i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>                                                     |     |    |
| “TRUTH-VISION” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO                                   | ... | 32 |
| <i>Gautam Malaker</i>                                                                |     |    |
| MAN OF A MOMENTOUS MOMENT — MANDELA                                                  | ... | 36 |
| <i>Anu Majumdar</i>                                                                  |     |    |
| AUROVILLE — A CITY FOR THE FUTURE                                                    | ... | 50 |
| <i>Poems from Auroville</i>                                                          |     |    |
| <i>Vikas</i>                                                                         |     |    |
| NOT DYING                                                                            | ... | 75 |
| THE TREE                                                                             | ... | 75 |
| <i>Celestine</i>                                                                     |     |    |
| I AM AN ACTIVE, LIVING DYNAMO                                                        | ... | 76 |
| <i>Meenakshi</i>                                                                     |     |    |
| THOUSANDS OF KINGDOMS                                                                | ... | 76 |
| <i>Alan Herbert</i>                                                                  |     |    |
| RETURN                                                                               | ... | 77 |
| HINGE                                                                                | ... | 77 |
| BEYOND                                                                               | ... | 77 |
| IT’S THE BODY, STUPID                                                                | ... | 78 |



## SONGS TO MYRTILLA

### GLAUCUS

Sweet is the night, sweet and cool  
As to parched lips a running pool;  
Sweet when the flowers have fallen asleep  
And only moonlit rivulets creep  
Like glow-worms in the dim and whispering wood,  
To commune with the quiet heart and solitude.  
When earth is full of whispers, when  
No daily voice is heard of men,  
But higher audience brings  
The footsteps of invisible things,  
When o'er the glimmering tree-tops bowed  
The night is leaning on a luminous cloud,  
And always a melodious breeze  
Sings secret in the weird and charmèd trees,  
Pleasant 'tis then heart-overawed to lie  
Alone with that clear moonlight and that listening sky.

### AETHON

But day is sweeter; morning bright  
Has put the stars out ere the light,  
And from their dewy cushions rise  
Sweet flowers half-opening their eyes.  
O pleasant then to feel as if new-born  
The sweet, unripe and virgin air, the air of morn.  
And pleasant are her melodies,  
Rustle of winds, rustle of trees,  
Birds' voices in the eaves,  
Birds' voices in the green melodious leaves;  
The herdsman's flute among his flocks,  
Sweet water hurrying from reluctant rocks,  
And all sweet hours and all sweet showers  
And all sweet sounds that please the noonday flowers.  
Morning has pleasure, noon has golden peace

And afternoon repose and eve the heart's increase.

All things are subject to sweet pleasure,  
 But three things keep her richest measure,  
 The breeze that visits heaven  
 And knows the planets seven,  
 The green spring with its flowery truth  
 Creative and the luminous heart of youth.  
 To all fair flowers and vernal  
 The wind makes melody diurnal.  
 On Ocean all night long  
 He rests, a voice of song.  
 The blue sea dances like a girl  
 With sapphire and with pearl  
 Crowning her locks. Sunshine and dew  
 Each morn delicious life renew.  
 The year is but a masque of flowers,  
 Of light and song and honied showers.  
 In the soft springtide comes the bird  
 Of heaven whose speech is one sweet word,  
 One word of sweet and magic power to bring  
 Green branches back and ruddy lights of spring.  
 Summer has pleasant comrades, happy meetings  
 Of lily and rose and from the trees divinest greetings.

### GLAUCUS

For who in April shall remember  
 The certain end of drear November?  
 No flowers then live, no flowers  
 Make sweet those wretched hours;  
 From dead or grieving branches spun  
 Unwilling leaves lapse wearily one by one;  
 The heart is then in pain  
 With the unhappy sound of rain.  
 No secret boughs prolong  
 A green retreat of song;  
 Summer is dead and rich repose  
 And springtide and the rose,  
 And woods and all sweet things make moan;

The weeping earth is turned to stone.  
 The lovers of her former face,  
 Shapes of beauty, melody, grace,  
 Where are they? Butterfly and bird  
 No more are seen, no songs are heard.  
 They see her beauty spent, her splendours done;  
 They seek a younger earth, a surer sun.  
 When youth has quenched its soft and magic light,  
 Delightful things remain but dead is their delight.

### AETHON

Ah! for a little hour put by  
 Dim Hades and his pageantry.  
 Forget the future, leave the past,  
 The little hour thy life shall last.  
 Learn rather from the violet's days  
 Soft-blooming in retired ways  
 Or dewy bell, the maid undrest  
 With creamy childhood in her breast,  
 Fierce foxglove and the briony  
 And sapphire thyme, the work-room of the bee.  
 Behold in emerald fire  
 The spotted lizard crawl  
 Upon the sun-kissed wall  
 And coil in tangled brake  
 The green and sliding snake  
 Under the red-rose-briar.  
 Nay, hither see  
 Lured by thy rose of lips the bee  
 To woo thy petals open, O sweet,  
 His flowery murmur here repeat,  
 Forsaking all the joys of thyme.  
 Stain not thy perfumed prime  
 With care for autumn's pale decay,  
 But live like these thy sunny day.  
 So when thy tender bloom must fall,  
 Then shalt thou be as one who tasted all  
 Life's honey and must now depart  
 A broken prodigal from pleasure's mart,

A leaf with whom each golden sunbeam sinned,  
A dewy leaf and kissed by every wandering wind.

### GLAUCUS

How various are thy children, Earth!  
Behold the rose her lovely birth,  
What fires from the bud proceed,  
As if the vernal air did bleed.  
Breezes and sunbeams, bees and dews  
Her lords and lovers she indues,  
And these her crimson pleasures prove;  
Her life is but a bath of love;  
The wide world perfumes when she sighs  
And, burning all the winds, of love she dies.  
The lily liveth pure,  
Yet has she lovers, friends,  
And each her bliss intends;  
The bees besides her treasure  
Besiege of pollened pleasure,  
Nor long her gates endure.  
The snowdrop cold  
Has vowed the saintly state to hold  
And far from green spring's amorous guilds  
Her snowy hermitage she builds.  
Cowslip attends her vernal duty  
And stops the heart with beauty.  
The crocus asks no vernal thing,  
But all the lovely lights of spring  
Are with rich honeysuckle boon  
And praise her through one summer moon.  
Thus the sweet children of the earth  
Fulfil their natural selves and various birth.  
For one is proud and one sweet months approve  
Diana's saint, but most are bondmaidens of Love.

Love's feet were on the sea  
When he dawned on me.  
His wings were purple-grained and slow;  
His voice was very sweet and very low;



His rose-lit cheeks, his eyes' pale bloom  
 Were sorrow's anteroom;  
 His wings did cause melodious moan;  
 His mouth was like a rose o'erblown;  
 The cypress-garland of renown  
 Did make his shadowy crown.  
 Fair as the spring he gave  
 And sadder than a winter's wave  
 And sweet as sunless asphodel,  
 My shining lily, Florimel,  
 My heart's enhaloed moon,  
 My winter's warmth, my summer's shady boon.

### AETHON

Not from the mighty sea  
 Love visited me.  
 I found as in a jewelled box  
 Love, rose-red, sleeping with imprisoned locks;  
 And I have ever known him wild  
 And merry as a child,  
 As roses red, as roses sweet,  
 The west wind in his feet,  
 Tulip-girdled, kind and bold,  
 With heartsease in his curls of gold,  
 Since in the silver mist  
 Bright Cymothea's lips I kissed,  
 Whose laughter dances like a gleam  
 Of sunlight on a hidden stream  
 That through a wooded way  
 Runs suddenly into the perfect day.  
 But what were Cymothea, placed  
 Where like a silver star Myrtilla blooms?  
 Such light as cressets cast  
 In long and sun-lit rooms.  
 Thy presence is to her  
 As oak to juniper,  
 Thy beauty as the gorgeous rose  
 To privet by the lane that blows,  
 Gold-crownèd blooms to mere fresh grass,  
 Eternal ivy to brief blooms that pass.

## GLAUCUS

But Florimel beside thee, sweet,  
 Pales like a candle in the brilliant noon.  
 Snowdrops are thy feet,  
 Thy waist a crescent moon,  
 And like a silver wand  
 Thy body slight doth stand  
 Or like a silver beech aspire.  
 Thine arms are walls for white caresses,  
 Thy mouth a tale of crimson kisses,  
 Thine eyes two amorous treasuries of fire.  
 To what shall poet liken thee?  
 Art thou a goddess of the sea  
 Purple-tressed and laughter-lipped  
 From thy choric sisters slipped  
 To wander on the flowery land?  
 Or art thou siren on the treacherous sand  
 Summer-voiced to charm the ear  
 Of the wind-vext mariner?  
 Ah! but what are these to thee,  
 Brighter gem than knows the sea,  
 Lovelier girl than sees the stream  
 Naked, Naiad of a dream,  
 Whiter Dryad than men see  
 Dancing round the lone oak-tree,  
 Flower and most enchanting birth  
 Of ten ages of the earth!  
 The Graces in thy body move  
 And in thy lips the ruby hue of Love.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 9-15)

## Note:

Circa 1890–98. This, the title-poem of the collection, is headed in the manuscript “Sweet is the night”. *Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems* is Sri Aurobindo’s first collection of poems, printed in 1898 for private circulation by the Lakshmi Vilas Printing Press, Baroda.

When a biographer suggested during the 1940s that all the poems in *Songs to Myrtilla* were written in Baroda, except for five that were written in England, Sri Aurobindo corrected him as follows: “It is the other way round; all the poems in the book were written in England except five later ones which were written after his return to India.” (Adapted from the ‘Notes on the Texts’ in CWSA, Vol. 2)

# TO HIS COUNTRYMEN, TO HUMANITY, TO THE NATION, TO THE INDIVIDUAL, TO THE STUDENTS

*(A compilation)*

To the sons of our mother Bharat who disclaim their sonhood, to the children of languor and selfishness, to the wooers of safety & ease, to the fathers of despair and death — greeting.

To those who impugning the holiness of their Mother refuse to lift her out of danger lest they defile their own spotless hands, to those who call on her to purify herself before they will save her from the imminent & already descending sword of Death, — greeting.

Lastly to those who love & perhaps have striven for her but having now grown themselves faint and hopeless bid others to despair and cease, — to them also greeting.

Brothers, — for whether unwise friends or selfish enemies of my Mother, you are still her children, — there is a common voice among you spreading dismay and weakness in the hearts of the people; for you say to each other and to all who would speak to you of their country, “Let us leave these things and look to our daily bread; this nation must perish but let us at least and our children try to live while live we can. We are fallen and depraved and our sins grow upon us day by day; we suffer & are oppressed and oppression increases with every setting of the sun; we are weak and languid and our weakness grows weaker and our languor more languid every time the sun rises in the east. We are sick and broken; we are idle and cowardly; we perish every year from famine and plague; disease decimates us, with every decade poverty annihilates family after family; where there were a hundred in one house, there are now ten; where there was once a flourishing village, the leopard and the jackal will soon inhabit. God is adverse to us and ourselves our worst enemies; we are decaying from within and smitten from without. The sword has been taken out of our hands and the bread is being taken out of our mouths. Worst of all we are disunited beyond hope of union and without union we must ere long perish. It may be five decades or it may be ten, but very soon this great and ancient nation will have perished from the face of the earth and the negro or the Malay will inherit the homes of our fathers & till the fields to glut the pockets & serve the pleasure of the Englishman or the Russian. Meanwhile it is well that the Congress should meet once a year & deceive the country with an appearance of life; that there should be posts for the children of the soil with enough salary to keep a few from starving, that a soulless education should suck the vigour & sweetness out of body & heart &

brain of our children while flattering them with the vain lie that they are educated & enlightened; for so shall the nation die peacefully of a sort of euthanasia lapped in lies & comforted with delusions and not violently & in a whirlwind of horror and a great darkness of fear & suffering.”

With such Siren song do you slay the hearts of those who have still force and courage to strive against Fate and would rescue our Mother out of the hands of destruction. Yet I would willingly believe that matricides though you are, it is in ignorance. Come therefore, let us reason calmly together.

Is it indeed . . . [*incomplete*]

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 68-69;

*an incomplete essay from the period before the partition of Bengal.*

*It was titled 'Unity — An open letter to those who despair of their Country.'*)

\*

. . . We say to humanity, “The time has come when you must take the great step and rise out of a material existence into the higher, deeper and wider life towards which humanity moves. The problems which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within, not by harnessing the forces of Nature to the service of comfort and luxury, but by mastering the forces of the intellect and the spirit, by vindicating the freedom of man within as well as without and by conquering from within external Nature. For that work the resurgence of Asia is necessary, therefore Asia rises. For that work the freedom and greatness of India is essential, therefore she claims her destined freedom and greatness, and it is to the interest of all humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim.”

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 26-27)

\*

We say to the nation, “It is God’s will that we should be ourselves and not Europe. We have sought to regain life by following the law of another being than our own. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purposes of our future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India’s eternal life and nature. It will therefore be the object of the *Karmayogin* to read the heart of our religion, our society, our philosophy, politics, literature, art, jurisprudence, science, thought, everything that was and is ours, so that we may be able to say to ourselves and our nation, ‘This is our *dharma*.’ We shall review European civilisation entirely from the standpoint of Indian thought and knowledge and seek to throw off from us

the dominating stamp of the Occident; what we have to take from the West we shall take as Indians. And the *dharma* once discovered we shall strive our utmost not only to profess but to live, in our individual actions, in our social life, in our political endeavours.”

(*Ibid.*, p. 27)

\*

We say to the individual and especially to the young who are now arising to do India's work, the world's work, God's work, “You cannot cherish these ideals, still less can you fulfil them if you subject your minds to European ideas or look at life from the material standpoint. Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything. It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives. Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you. Difficulty and impossibility will vanish from your vocabularies. For it is in the spirit that strength is eternal and you must win back the kingdom of yourselves, the inner Swaraj, before you can win back your outer empire. There the Mother dwells and She waits for worship that She may give strength. Believe in Her, serve Her, lose your wills in Hers, your egoism in the greater ego of the country, your separate selfishness in the service of humanity. Recover the source of all strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you, social soundness, intellectual pre-eminence, political freedom, the mastery of human thought, the hegemony of the world.”

(*Ibid.*, pp. 27-28)

\*

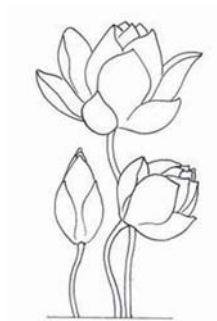
. . . The only piece of advice that I can give you<sup>1</sup> now is — carry out the work, the mission, for which this college was created. I have no doubt that all of you have realised by this time what this mission means. When we established this college, and left other occupations, other chances of life, to devote our lives to this institution, we did so because we hoped to see in it the foundation, the nucleus, of a nation, of the new India which is to begin its career after this night of sorrow and trouble, on that day of glory and greatness when India will work for the world. What we want

1. The students of the Bengal National College. Talk of 23 August 1907.

here is not merely to give you a little information, not merely to open to you careers for earning a livelihood, but to build up sons for the motherland to work and to suffer for her. That is why we started this college and that is the work to which I want you to devote yourselves in future. What has been insufficiently and imperfectly begun by us, it is for you to complete and lead to perfection. When I come back I wish to see some of you becoming rich, rich not for yourselves but that you may enrich the Mother with your riches. I wish to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sakes, not that you may satisfy your own vanity, but great for her, to make India great, to enable her to stand up with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in days of yore when the world looked up to her for light. Even those who will remain poor and obscure, I want to see their very poverty and obscurity devoted to the motherland. There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may live for her sake. You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice. My last word to you is that if you have sympathy for me, I hope to see it not merely as a personal feeling, but as a sympathy with what I am working for. I want to see this sympathy translated into work so that when in future I shall look upon your career of glorious activity I may have the pride of remembering that I did something to prepare and begin it.

*(Bande Mataram, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 656-57)*

SRI AUROBINDO



## ‘IT IS FOR US . . . TO ASPIRE’

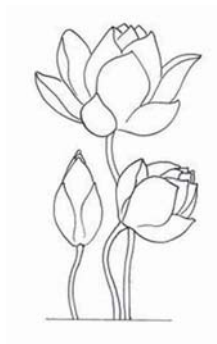
**June 18, 1914**

Always the same Will is at work. The Force is there awaiting the possibility to manifest: we must discover the new form which will make the new manifestation possible. And Thou, only Thou, O Lord, can grant us this knowledge. It is for us with our whole being to make the effort, to ask, to aspire. But it is for Thee to answer with the Illumination, the Knowledge and the Power.

Oh, the canticle of joy of Thy victorious Presence . . .

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 177)*



## LETTERS TO A YOUNG SADHAK

(Continued from the issue of November 2018)

[This Series is organised broadly by subject into thirteen parts — the form in which it was originally published. The replies here were written between 1933 and 1949 — most of them between 1933 and 1935.]

### VII

*I must find out how I can consecrate this being to You.*

Keep always burning in you the fire of aspiration and purification which I have kindled there.

\*

*Without perseverance one never attains anything.*

Because a thing is difficult it does not mean that one should give it up; on the contrary, the more difficult a thing is, the greater must be the will to carry it out successfully.

Of all things the most difficult is to bring the divine consciousness into the material world. Must the endeavour then be given up because of this?

\*

Our way is *very long*, and it is indispensable to advance calmly without asking oneself at every step whether one is advancing.

\*

If you persevere you are sure to succeed; as for my help you may rest assured it is always with you, and one never calls in vain.

\*

If you resolve to do it, my force will be there to back up your effort.

\*



You would be wrong to get disturbed; nothing is done arbitrarily, and things get realised only when they are the expression of an inner truth.

\*

Yes, your mind gets too excited about things. It makes formations (it thinks forcefully: this must be like that, that must be otherwise, etc.) and unknowingly it clings to its own formations in such a way that when they are contradicted it gets a shock and this gives it pain. It must become calm and develop the habit of remaining quiet.

\*

Have faith in the Divine Grace and the hour of liberation will be hastened.

\*

It is absolutely false that anything human can heal a human evil.

*Only the Divine* can heal. It is in *Him alone* that one must seek help and support, it is in *Him alone* that one must put all one's hope.

\*

All my power is with you to help you; open yourself with a calm confidence, have faith in the Divine Grace, and you will overcome all your difficulties.

\*

Do not worry, only keep in you always the will to do things well.

\*

Why accept the idea of being weak? It is this which is bad.

\*

Yes, it is in a calm and patient confidence that lies the certitude of victory.

\*

*Confidence in the Divine I do not lack, but it is perhaps my ego which unceasingly says that I cannot accomplish what the Divine wants of me.*

Yes, and as soon as the ego surrenders and abdicates, this fear disappears giving place to the calm assurance that nothing is impossible.

\*

*“You will overcome all your difficulties” — I repeat this; only my whole being does not accept it.*

If you repeat it with sufficient constancy, the recalcitrant part will at last be convinced.

\*

Yes, you are right to have hope; it is hope which builds happy futures.

\*

*I have quite forgotten my past.*

Yes, one must forget one's past.

\*

But why torment yourself so much? Be calm, don't get disturbed, remember that the conditions of our life are not quite ordinary conditions, and keep your trust in the Divine Power to organise all and do all through the human instruments which are open to His influence.

\*

*Be with me, Mother, without You I am weak, very weak and fearful.*

One must have no fear, victory is for him who is without fear; I am always with you to guide and protect you.

\*

One must have no fear — fear is a bad counsellor; it acts like a magnet and attracts what we fear. One must, on the contrary, keep a calm certitude that sooner or later all will be well.

\*

To be pessimistic has never been of any use except to attract towards oneself just the things one fears. One must, on the contrary, drive off all pessimistic thoughts and compel oneself to think only of what one wants to happen.

### VIII

*My adored Mother, Sri Aurobindo's last letter made me think much. The most obvious sign of the action of an adverse force — it is this that I want to learn to see in myself and others.*

1st sign: One feels far away from Sri Aurobindo and me.

2nd: One loses confidence, begins to criticise, is not satisfied.

3rd: One revolts and sinks into falsehood.

\*

Do not grieve. Always the same battle must be won several times, especially when it is waged against the hostile forces. That is why one must be armed with patience and keep faith in the final victory.

\*

*My beloved Mother, can the adverse forces act effectively against the terrestrial evolution without using a human being as an intermediary?*

It is not impossible, but it is easier for them to find a human instrument.

\*

It is good to be confident and to have a living and steady faith. But in the matter of the adverse forces, it is good to be always vigilant and sincere.

\*

*Mother, what attitude should I take towards women? There is a part in me which prompts me to go to X. This recalcitrant part advises me to do so, telling me that this is the best means of overcoming an attraction, whether small or great.*

This is childish; it is always the same trap of the adverse forces; if, instead of expressing their advice under cleverly perverted forms, they were to speak of things as they are, it would come to something like this: “Continue to drink in order to stop being a drunkard” or better: “Continue to kill to stop being a murderer!”

\*

One must never be afraid, and if the adverse forces try to lodge themselves in your lower nature, you have only to dislodge them, calling me to your help.

\*

*Mother, last night I had a nightmare and was almost frightened.*

One must never be afraid. Even in your sleep you must be able to remember me and call me to your help if there is some danger. You will see that the nightmares will vanish.

\*

*It seemed to me that there was someone in my room who wanted to suck my blood; I wanted to stretch my left hand to him so that he could do so.*

If you start feeding the adverse forces, they will exact more and more and will never be satisfied.

*Y told me that very often he becomes an instrument of the adverse forces.*

Much of this is *his own imagination*; if he thought less of these so-called vital beings, most of them would be immediately dissolved.

\*

*If I can remain peaceful in the face of all circumstances, I can be sure that the hostile force is far from me.*

Yes, on condition that the “peace” is not that of a *hardening* but of a conscious force.

\*

*Mother, I do not quite understand what a peace of “hardening” means.*

I am speaking of the peace experienced by those who are utterly insensible and indifferent to the misfortunes of the world and the suffering of others, those who have turned their hearts to stones and are incapable of compassion.

## IX

*If I could detach myself entirely from this outer world, if I could be quite alone, I would master this depression which I cannot shake off.*

This is not at all correct; the experience of all recluses, all ascetics, proves indisputably the contrary. The difficulty comes from oneself, from one’s own nature, and one takes it along wherever one goes, whatever the conditions one may be in. There is but one way of getting out of it — it is to conquer the difficulty, overcome one’s lower nature. And is this not easier here, with a concrete and tangible help, than all alone, without anyone to shed light on the path and guide the uncertain footsteps?

\*

*My darling Mamma, I want to lead a pure life and I shall do all I can to progress towards the divine life.*

This does not depend so much on outer conditions, but above all on the inner state. A pure being is always pure, in all circumstances.

\*

*You will admit that one can’t live with others without being influenced more or less by them.*

No, this is wrong! It is true of the ordinary life but not of a yogi.

\*

*Sweet Mother, if my company is not good for others, should I not dissociate myself from everyone?*

It would be much better to dissociate yourself from the tendency to fall into your ordinary consciousness.

\*

*What will be the result if I meditate on the thought that there is no difference between a certain thing, no matter which, and me; for the Divine is as much present in that thing as in me?*

Probably a disastrous result; that is, a passive opening to all sorts of influences, most of which are hardly commendable.

\*

*A yogi ought to accept and digest all dirt with a perfect equality.*

Why? I don't see that this is necessary. The effort which would be needed to become immune from the effects of dirt can be utilised much more profitably elsewhere.

\*

*Mother dearest, You make me very happy and I would like to see everybody as happy as I.*

Of course, this shows very good feelings. But a certain amount of knowledge must be added to these sentiments. For, to communicate peace and joy to others is not so easy, and unless one has within oneself *an unshakable peace and joy*, there is a great risk of losing what one has rather than passing it on to others.

\*

*My heart is full of compassion for others and I am not insensible to their suffering, but what's the good of this feeling if I cannot come to their aid in their suffering?*

One cannot help others to overcome their sorrows and sufferings unless one has overcome all this in oneself and is master of one's feelings and reactions.

\*

It is to purify your own heart that you must work, instead of passing your time in judging what others do or don't do.

\*

Yes, one must distrust superficial and baseless judgments.

\*

It is just when one is innocent that one ought to be most indifferent to ill-treatment, because there is nothing to blame oneself for and one has the approbation of one's conscience to console oneself.

\*

It would be much better for you not to busy yourself with what others say.

\*

Surely those who have courage must have some for those who have none.

\*

*I nearly got angry and it was with an effort that I controlled myself.*

It is very good to control one's anger. Even if it were only to learn to do so, these contacts with others are useful.

\*

I do not know of anything more foolish than these quarrels in which everybody is in the wrong. And is there anything more ridiculous than ruffled *amours-propres*?

\*

In keeping quiet one never risks doing anything wrong, while one has nine chances out of ten of saying something stupid when one speaks.

\*

It is never good to tell a lie, but here its results cannot but be disastrous, for falsehood is the very symbol of that which wants to oppose the divine work of Truth.

## X

Health is the outer expression of a deep harmony, one must be proud of it and not despise it.

\*

Why imagine always that one is ill or is going to be ill and thus open oneself to all kinds of bad suggestions? There is no reason to be ill and I don't see why you should be so.

\*

*Mother dearest, I have caught a cold. Should I take my bath as usual?*

Do as you like, this is not of much importance; but what is important is to cast off fear. It is fear which makes one fall ill and it is fear which makes healing so difficult. All fear must be overcome and replaced by a complete trust in the divine Grace.

\*

*For several days there has been pain in the nape of the neck; I am tired of the remedies our dispensary gives me. I rely on Your Will alone to rid me of this illness.*

One must have an unshakable faith to be able to do without medicines.

\*

One must never lose hope or faith — there is nothing incurable, and no limit can be set to the power of the Divine.

\*

One must find the inner peace and keep it constantly. In the force this peace brings, all these little miseries will disappear.

\*

*Mother, the inherent tendency of the material body is to dissolve, and the mind helps it; how will You be able to stop the natural propensity of my body to disintegration?*



It must become aware of the immortality of the elements constituting it (which is a scientifically recognised fact), then it must submit itself to the influence and the will of the psychic being which is immortal in its very nature.

\*

*Beloved Mother, do You grant that it is possible to do without food?*

For food to be no longer necessary, the body would have to be completely transformed and no longer subject to any of the laws governing it at present.

\*

I don't see why people should feel guilty because they are hungry. If food is prepared, it is for eating.

\*

*My most beloved Mother, I think it would be better to avoid a party of this kind.*

Evidently, this creates an atmosphere in which food predominates; this is not very conducive to spiritual life.

## XI

The vital is at once the place of desires and energies, impulses and passions, of cowardice, but also of heroism — to bridle it is to turn all this towards the divine Will and submit it to this Will.

\*

*The vital being seeks only power — material possession and terrestrial power.*

This also is false. The higher part of the vital being, like the higher part of the mental being, aspires for the Divine and suffers when far from Him.

\*

*This desire to live in an intellectual atmosphere — doesn't it show that my mind can govern the vital?*

No, it only shows that in your consciousness the mind takes a bigger place than the vital. What I call the domination of the mind over the vital is when the latter takes no initiative, accepts no impulse which has not been first sanctioned by the mind, when no desire, no passion arises unless the mind thinks it good; and if an impulse of desire, passion or violence comes from outside, it is enough that the mind intervenes for it to be immediately controlled.

\*

*Mother dearest, the vital desires will vanish as gradually my body becomes weaker, won't they?*

Certainly not; quite on the contrary, to be able to conquer the desires of the vital one must have an excellent physical equilibrium and sound health.

\*

In the vital world attraction and repulsion are the right and wrong sides of the same thing and always indicate an attachment. One must persistently turn away one's thought from its object.

\*

*Should one always avoid a circumstance which is conducive to undesirable impulses? Or should one rather accept the circumstance and try to be its master?*

It is always better to avoid the temptation.

\*

One has only to persist with a calm confidence and the vital will stop going on strike.

\*

Depression is always unreasonable and leads nowhere. It is the most subtle enemy of yoga.

## XII

*In Your Conversations You have said that the intellect is like an intermediary between the true knowledge and its realisation here below. Does it not follow that intellectual culture is indispensable for rising above the mind to find there the true knowledge?*

Intellectual culture is indispensable for preparing a good mental instrument, large, supple and rich, but its action stops there.

In rising above the mind, it is more often a hindrance than a help, for, in general, a refined and educated mind finds its satisfaction in itself and rarely seeks to silence itself so as to be surpassed.

\*

*It is a passing impulse which pushes me so much to study.*

So long as you need to form yourself, to build your brain, you will feel this strong urge to study; but when the brain is well formed, the taste for studies will gradually die away.

\*

*My beloved Mother, I want to follow a systematic course of metaphysics and ethics. I am also thinking of reading The Life Divine.*

If you read metaphysics and ethics, you must do it just as *mental gymnastics* to give a little exercise to your brain, but never lose sight of the fact that *this is not a source of knowledge* and that it is not in this way that one can draw close to knowledge. Naturally, this does not hold good for *The Life Divine* . . .

\*

In silence lies the source of the highest inspirations.

\*

*Identification with the Divine is our goal; I don't see why I am trying to know this or that.*

It is not the work that is of importance but the spirit in which one does it. It is difficult to keep one's mind perfectly quiet; it is better to engage it in studies than in silly ideas or unhealthy dreamings.

\*

*I want to see what will happen to me if I stop reading completely.*

It is difficult to keep one's mind always fixed on the same thing, and if it is not given enough work to occupy it, it begins to become restless. So I think it is better to choose one's books carefully rather than stop reading altogether.

\*

*I am reading a book on cars, but I read it hastily; I skip the descriptions of complicated mechanisms.*

If you don't want to learn a thing thoroughly, conscientiously and in all its details, it is better not to take it up at all. It is a great mistake to think that a little superficial and incomplete knowledge of things can be of any use whatsoever; it is good for nothing except making people conceited, for they imagine they know and in fact know nothing.

\*

It is very difficult to choose games which are useful and beneficial for a child. It asks for much consideration and reflection, and all that one does unthinkingly may have unhappy consequences.

\*

*I am reading Molière; his writings are light.*

Not as much as they seem to be. There is a deep and very wise observation in the comedies of Molière.

\*

*I have just finished Salammbô;<sup>1</sup> I did not find any ideal character in it.*

It is not a book of ideas; it is only for the beauty of its form and style that it is remarkable.

\*

*When one reads a dirty book, an obscene novel, does not the vital enjoy it through the mind?*

1. A novel by Gustave Flaubert.

In the mind also there are perversions. It is a rather poor and unrefined vital which can take pleasure in such things!

### XIII

*The students talk so much in the class that I have to scold them often.*

It is not with severity but with *self-mastery* that children are controlled.

\*

I must tell you that if a teacher wants to be respected, he must *be respectable*. X is not the only one to say that you use violence to make yourself obeyed; nothing is less respectable. You must first control yourself and never use brute force to impose your will.

\*

I have always thought that something in the teacher's character was responsible for the indiscipline of his students.

\*

*I hope you will give me precise instructions which will help me keep order in my classes.*

The most important is to master yourself and never lose your temper. If you don't have control over yourself, how can you expect to control others, above all, children, who feel it immediately when someone is not master of himself?

\*

*The students cannot learn their lessons even when they have their books.*

One must have a lot of patience with young children, and repeat the same thing to them several times, explaining it to them in various ways. It is only gradually that it enters their mind.

THE MOTHER

*(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 181-97)*

## TRUTH-VISION — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Is this mere rhetoric?

### TRUTH-VISION

How shall you see  
Through a mist of tears  
The laughing lips of beauty,  
The golden heart of years?

Oh never say  
That tears had birth  
In the weeping soul of ages,  
The gloomy brow of earth!

Nought save your eyes  
Carry the blame  
For giving tearful answers  
To questionings of flame.

What drew that film  
Across your sight  
Was only the great dazzle  
Of everlasting Light!

Frailty begot  
Your wounded gaze:  
Eagle your life<sup>1</sup>, O spirit,  
To see the golden Face.

[*Amal's question in the left margin:*]

1. "mood"?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. Yes

It is exceedingly beautiful, one of the best things you have done.

[*Amal to Sri Aurobindo at the bottom of the sheet:*]

I am surprised — of course, most happily, but very much all the same. I was aware of an original turn of idea in the poem and some drive in the language, but, as my question indicated, I was somehow missing the subtle secrets of sound. On re-reading now, I begin to appreciate the lines more: especially the words “questionings of flame” seem fraught with a multiple suggestion. But I shall be thankful to learn from you what qualities pleased you to such a great extent. If it is one of my best things, I hope you won’t mind my asking you for a little analysis.

[*Sri Aurobindo’s answer:*]

Well, it is surprising that such a thing of beauty should have passed through you without your feeling its charm and power. But don’t ask me to analyse it. Things like that cannot be analysed, they can only be felt. It has throughout the perfection of simple inevitability about which no one can say “it is because of this that it is beautiful or because of that.” The more I read it, the more it grows upon me.

13 November 1935

\*

Sri Aurobindo —

Though an element of diffidence was there in me, I can’t say I did not feel the charm and power of my poem. I surely did: whenever a fine thing comes through, I experience its enthusiasmos — but I am a little afraid to let myself go before hearing from you. And I may say that the absolutely complete realisation of the beauty of a poem I get after you have commented. Then I keep on re-reading and cannot help marvelling how these inspirations could ever have got embodied through me. With regard to the present work, I caught the full taste of its perfection now only — and that too just once; but I thrilled to it each time I read it. It may be interesting to know that I wrote it almost at a stroke. I was reading something when an idea jumped into my mind, took an original turn, drew some fresh intuitions to itself and rushed out in writing. Later I strengthened two or three weak expressions, and was about to send it to you when a last reading told me that the concluding two lines were somehow unworthy and ineffective. So I delayed the poem a day. When the verb-use of the noun “eagle” struck me, I knew that the inevitable form had been grasped. The first version was:

Love Spirit like an eagle  
To see her golden face.

I thought somebody might ask me: “How does an eagle love Spirit?” Besides, it had an air of a sort of moral drawn. So (and for other reasons, too) I said: “Won’t do.”

[*Sri Aurobindo's answer:*]

The change obviously makes all the difference.

15 November 1935

\*

Sri Aurobindo —

Premanand points out that the grammar of

Nought save your eyes

Carry the blame

is faulty. I suppose I should write “Carries”; but should I put “eye” instead of “eyes” to improve the rhythm as well as grammatical suggestion as distinguished from grammatical fact?

[*Sri Aurobindo's answer:*]

“eyes” is better — “eye” sounds as if you were looking or weeping with one eye. Grammar was always a nuisance.

15 November 1935

\*

[*Amal's postscript in another letter to Sri Aurobindo:*]

P.S.: In “Truth-Vision”, “eyes” and “carries” definitely spoil the rhythm and language. I want to change thus:

Your eyes alone

Carry the blame . . .

[*Sri Aurobindo's answer:*]

Yes, that is all right.

?.?.1935

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**TRUTH-VISION**

How shall you see  
Through a mist of tears  
The laughing lips of beauty,  
The golden heart of years?

Oh never say  
That tears had birth  
In the weeping soul of ages,  
The gloomy brow of earth!

Your eyes alone  
Carry the blame  
For giving tearful answers  
To questionings of flame.

What drew that film  
Across your sight  
Was only the great dazzle  
Of everlasting Light!

Frailty begot  
Your wounded gaze:  
Eagle your mood, O spirit,  
To see the golden Face.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

# MAN OF A MOMENTOUS MOMENT — MANDELA

*(Continued from the issue of November 2018)*

## **From human to humane**

Mandela had some exceptional qualities but he did have a few weaknesses too. From the age of twelve Mandela was brought up by the acting Regent of the Thembu tribe. He received the best education that a black could expect. He would later become worldly and westernised. Some of his closest friends would always attribute his regal self-confidence (and his occasional autocratic behaviour) to his upbringing in a royal household.

About Mandela's early political years South African journalist, Benjamin Pogrund, wrote:

The whisper among some was that he was not to be taken seriously. It sprang from his imposing appearance: tall, handsome, impeccably dressed in a suit when most black people were poor and shabby; there was his reputation as a ladies' man and his second marriage to the beautiful Winnie; there was the fact that he was a solicitor, one of the tiny number of the elite among black people; and he owned a car, a rarity among black people at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Alluding to the early 1950s Mandela's friend, Anthony Sampson, who later wrote his authorised biography, said he was an impressive dresser who drove an Oldsmobile, and despite his political activity, "he seemed to me to be a bit of a showman really. I didn't take him seriously enough". "I hadn't realised quite the steel that lay beneath because he was a very romantic, handsome, impressive character," he added.<sup>2</sup>

Mandela was not a brilliant student. Though he had completed his BA, he left the university in 1952 without completing his LLB. He started studying again after his imprisonment in 1962 but was unable to complete the degree. However, he persevered and in 1989, at the end of his prison term, he finally obtained an LLB.

In his pre-prison political days Mandela was not liked by several people because of his arrogant ways. In an interview he said: "In my younger days, I was arrogant — jail helped me to get rid of it. I did nothing but make enemies because of my arrogance."<sup>3</sup>

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-10524587>.

3. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

On the other hand, Bill Keller, executive editor of *The New York Times*, writing about his generosity of spirit after prison life, gave his own perspective by stating: “Some who worked with him said this apparent magnanimity came easily to him because he always regarded himself as superior to his persecutors.”<sup>4</sup>

However, by all accounts, Mandela became a humble man. He learnt the lesson of humility in prison. The prison experience, he said, taught him to respect even the most ordinary people. “I have been surprised a great deal sometimes when I see somebody who looks less than ordinary, but when you talk to the person and he (or she) opens his mouth, he is something completely different. It is possible that if I had not gone to jail and been able to read and to listen to the stories of many people . . . I might not have learned these things.” Mandela also read the biographies of the great leaders of the century; he felt they had a major impact on him. He said it was through reading the biographies that he realised that problems make some people and destroy others.<sup>5</sup>

Mandela was once asked, “Are there any international figures who you haven’t met but who you would like to?” His thoughtful reply was, “There are so many men and women who hold no distinctive positions but whose contribution towards the development of society has been enormous. Some of them are not known even in their own countries, but when you come across them you are very impressed. Those are heroes or heroines we must never forget. Because of their service to society, you can’t really help but admire them.”<sup>6</sup>

An aspect of Mandela’s humility was being level-headed and down to earth. He told BBC that, “One issue that deeply worried me in prison was the false image I unwittingly projected to the outside world; of being regarded as a saint. I never was one, even on the basis of an earthly definition of a saint as a sinner who keeps trying.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1999 at the launch of a book to commemorate him, written by South African journalist Charlene Smith, Mandela insisted that he not be elevated to some kind of sainthood. He says it is important that leaders should be presented to people with their weaknesses and all. “If you come across as a saint, people can become very discouraged,” he says. “I was once a young man and I did all the things young men do,” Mandela said, to drive home the point of his human fallibility.<sup>8</sup>

*Time* managing editor Richard Stengel writes: “When he ‘retired from his retirement’ (as he put it in 2004), I thought it was simply because he couldn’t bear not remembering familiar things and he could not bear people seeing him in a way

4. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela\\_obit.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?pagewanted=all).

5. See [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes).

6. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=results](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=results).

7. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-10743920>.

8. See [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes).

that did not live up to their expectations. He wanted people to see Nelson Mandela, and he was no longer the Nelson Mandela they wanted to see.”<sup>9</sup>

Helen Suzman, a liberal parliamentarian whom Mandela called “courageous woman” for visiting Robben Island Prison with the object to improve its conditions, wrote: “I do not believe Nelson Mandela was a saint. On many occasions he expressed his anger, sometimes even in public. But in my interactions with him from 1967 when I first visited him and other political prisoners on Robben Island, he always had a remarkable sense of humour. He had an amazing way of communicating with people, particularly the young, he mesmerised them. It was not a politician’s way: unlike many politicians he had a warmth to him, a real warmth.”<sup>10</sup>

“Nelson Mandela was not a saint. We would dishonour his memory if we treated him as if he was one,” wrote law professor, Pierre de Vos. He argued that Mandela’s genius lay in his willingness to bend and compromise. “Like all truly exceptional human beings, he was a person of flesh and blood, with his own idiosyncrasies, his own blind spots and weaknesses.”<sup>11</sup>

When *Reader’s Digest* asked Mandela, “How would you like to be remembered in history?” he replied, “I do not want to be presented as some deity. I would like to be remembered as an ordinary human being with virtues and vices.”<sup>12</sup>

In the same interview he was asked, “What would you say is your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?” He replied, “Well, I have a lot of weaknesses,” and then added, either modestly or untruthfully, “I don’t think I’ve got any strengths.”<sup>13</sup>

On the tenth anniversary of his release from prison, Mandela was at pains to point out that he be remembered as an ordinary mortal with qualities that are within the reach of ordinary people. “What always worried me in prison was [that I could acquire] the image of someone who is always 100 percent correct and can never do any wrong,” he told one audience of 500. “People expect me to perform far beyond my ability.” In the interview, Mandela insisted that he wanted to be remembered as part of a collective and not in isolation and that he regarded himself as a “loyal and obedient servant” of the African National Congress (ANC). “I would like to be remembered as part of a team, and I would like my contribution to be assessed as somebody who carried out decisions taken by that collective,” Mandela says, adding that even if he wanted to be remembered in a specific way that was not a realistic option.

Mandela was sincere, balanced and humble enough to recognise that some of his political comrades scored over him in some significant ways. He spoke of his

9. <http://world.time.com/2013/12/05/nelson-mandela-1918-2013-remembering-an-icon-of-freedom/>

10. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

11. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/mandela-reverence-criticism-too-rick-lyman-new-york-times>.

12. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=results](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=results).

13. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=results](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=results).

admiration of his political comrades: “I’m not just saying this out of humility, but some of those men were more intelligent and more determined as fighters for freedom than I was.”<sup>14</sup> He also spoke of the influence that veteran ANC leader Walter Sisulu had over him and how he was instrumental in taking care of fellow prisoners regardless of their political background. Mandela says, “I can tell you that a man like Sisulu was almost like a saint in things of that nature. You would really admire him because he is continually thinking about other people. I learned a great deal from him — not only in that respect but also, politically, he was our mentor. He is a very good fellow . . . and humble. He led from behind and put others in front, but he reversed the position in situations of danger. Then he chose to be in the front line.”<sup>15</sup>

Another person who had a great influence in his life was his law partner and ANC colleague, Oliver Tambo. Tambo had limitless compassion and patience, a lesson that Mandela imbibed over time.

Mandela realised that he was a person with strengths and weaknesses who had evolved over time. Celebrated talk show host Oprah Winfrey told him in an interview, “One reason I hold you and your comrades in such high reverence is that you maintained your dignity in the face of oppression. You must be proud of yourself for that.” Mandela’s balanced reply was: “You are very generous, Oprah. All I can tell you is that if I am the person you say I am, I was not always that man.”<sup>16</sup>

In the same interview Mandela explained how he had managed to change himself from his days as a political activist:

*Oprah: The last time we talked, you said that if you hadn’t been in prison, you wouldn’t have achieved the most difficult task in life — changing yourself. How did 27 years of reflection make you a different man?*

Nelson Mandela: Before I went to jail, I was active in politics as a member of South Africa’s leading organisation — and I was generally busy from 7 a.m. until midnight. I never had time to sit and think. As I worked, physical and mental fatigue set in and I was unable to operate to the maximum of my intellectual ability. But in a single cell in prison, I had time to think. I had a clear view of my past and present, and I found that my past left much to be desired, both in regard to my relations with other humans and in developing personal worth.

*Oprah: In what way did your past leave much to be desired?*

14. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

15. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes).

16. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

Nelson Mandela: When I reached Johannesburg in the 1940s, I was neglected by my family because I had disappointed them — I'd run away from being forced into an arranged marriage, which was a big blow to them. In Johannesburg, many people were kind to me — but when I finished my studies and qualified as a lawyer, I got busy with politics and never thought of them. It was only when I was in jail that I wondered, "What happened to so-and-so? Why didn't I go back and say thank you?" I had become very small and had not behaved like a human who appreciates hospitality and support. I decided that if I ever got out of prison, I would make it up to those people or to their children and grandchildren. That is how I was able to change my life — by knowing that if somebody does something good for you, you have to respond.

*Oprah: All the time.*

Nelson Mandela: And that is what I am doing now — responding. There is nothing I fear more than waking up without a program that will help me bring a little happiness to those with no resources, those who are poor, illiterate, and ridden with terminal disease. If there is anything that will one day kill me, it will be the inability to help them. If I can spend a tiny part of my life making them happy, I'll be happy.<sup>17</sup>

Prison life had indeed made Mandela a more sensitive and understanding man. "In prison, we ate three times a day, we had clothing, we had free medical services, and we could sleep for 12 hours. Others did not enjoy these things," he said.<sup>18</sup>

Oprah later said Mandela "will always be my hero". "He was everything you've ever heard and more — humble and unscathed by bitterness. And he always loved to tell a good joke. Being in his presence was like sitting with grace and majesty at the same time. His life was a gift to us all."<sup>19</sup>

By his own admission Mandela was quite a fiery and hot-headed political activist, and also at times arrogant in the 1940s and 1950s, but his imprisonment in a single cell at Robben Island gave him time to reflect. He added: "And you were in contact with a lot of people who had a high education and who were widely travelled. When they told of their experiences, you felt humbled. All those influences changed one."<sup>20</sup> This led to a remarkable transformation, for after his release he was one of the most courteous men you could ever have met.

British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd wrote, "I continued to be enveloped in Mandela's exceptional courtesy. He was one of the three politest men I ever met,

17. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

18. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

19. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-06/world-leaders-pay-tribute-to-nelson-mandela/5139536>.

20. See [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?)

the others being Sir Alec Douglas-Home and King Hussein of Jordan. All three came from the aristocracy of their country. They never needed to consider who they were or worry about their status. They thus gained the assurance to treat others as equals.”<sup>21</sup>

*Time* managing editor Richard Stengel wrote, “The man who walked onto Robben Island in 1964 was emotional, headstrong, easily stung. The man who emerged was balanced and disciplined.”<sup>22</sup>

At Victor Verster Prison, whilst Mandela was in negotiations with the government, he was given warder Jack Swart to look after him daily: to prepare meals, clean the house, and monitor visitors. Swart spoke of Mandela’s unassuming nature: “My relationship with Mandela was easy. . . . He was very easy, he never complained. He never got angry with me. But if he felt you got [the better of] him he wanted to get you back.”<sup>23</sup>

In an interview Swart was asked, “When you’re at Victor Verster, Mandela was your master, although he was also a prisoner. How did you feel about that?” He replied, “He never created the idea that he was your boss, that you worked for him. He was grateful about everything you did for him. . . . Then Mr. Mandela said to me he would wash the dishes. I mean, this gave me the idea, if he really felt that he was my boss, or he was in control, he wouldn’t have offered to wash the dishes. Even his clothes he washed himself. I just had to show him how the automatic washing machine worked.”<sup>24</sup>

Mandela in his book, *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself* gave his own perspective of sharing the work with Swart. He writes, “[Swart] was prepared to cook and wash the dishes. But . . . I took it upon myself to break the tension and a possible resentment on his part that he has to serve a prisoner by cooking and then washing dishes and I offered to wash dishes and he refused. He says that is his task. I said, ‘No, we must share it!’ Although he insisted, and he was genuine, but I forced him, literally forced him, to allow me to do the dishes, and we established a very good relationship. . . . A really nice chap, Warder Swart, a very good friend of mine.”<sup>25</sup>

Swart also revealed: “Sometimes I’d prepare meals and people wouldn’t pitch up. I remember one instance where a famous boxer failed to arrive, and three times Brenda Fassie never kept her arrangement. When that happened Mandela would ask us — Gregory, Marais, and me [warders] — to eat with him. He hated to see food go to waste. Once he even had leftover tomato soup for breakfast.”<sup>26</sup>

21. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

22. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1821659-3,00.html> (Interview with *Time*).

23. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org>.

24. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/prison/swart.html>.

25. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org> (Nelson Mandela, *Conversations with Myself*, p. 253).

26. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org>.

When Mandela was being finally released from prison, Swart had prepared a packed lunch for Mandela as he was scheduled to fly to Johannesburg that Saturday afternoon. However at the last minute Mandela decided to leave a day later. Swart said “I didn’t prepare him anything special for that Saturday evening, in fact he ate the food I’d prepared for his trip to Johannesburg. He didn’t want to have it go to waste.”<sup>27</sup>

During the negotiations Mandela was provided with suits prior to his meeting with President Botha. Swart narrates an interesting incident: “When my wife shortened his pants for him, the first suits he got . . . Then he told me, ‘I must go and find out in Paarl what they ask for it.’ I said, ‘But why? We’re not going to have it done.’ But he just said, ‘No, find out what it costs.’ I came back and told him what they normally charge . . . for shortening pants. And then he let her shorten two pairs of pants, and gave me the [money] and told me to tell her that she had really earned it. I said, ‘No, she doesn’t want it,’ but he said, ‘No, she must take it, because that’s what it costs to have the pants shortened.’”<sup>28</sup>

After Mandela became president he did not forget his warders. Swart recollects, “He invited us to the inauguration in Pretoria, both my wife and I, and Mr. Gregory and his wife, and Mr. Marais and his wife. Gave plane tickets and everything. But there was a little of a bit of confusion . . . because there were so many people, the groups were divided up into tents, but we were supposed to have been in the white tent where he was . . . He also invited us to the inauguration, his first speech in parliament, and it was interesting. When we got there, his secretary came to us and said, ‘You are not getting away this time. He really wants to see you . . . you just stay here.’ We were then put into the Presidential box . . . we went round to his house next to Parliament . . . we had tea with them . . . and the next occasion that I heard from him, was when he invited me to his birthday party . . .”<sup>29</sup>

As regards the other warder, James Gregory, who Mandela had invited to his inauguration with plane tickets and hospitality, there was a sad incident when Mandela was in the last months of his imprisonment. Gregory’s son Brent died in a motor car accident and in response to this tragedy Mandela wrote a note: “I was deeply shocked to hear of the tragic death of your beloved son, Brent, and on behalf of myself and family I send you our sincerest sympathy. Few things are as painful as an invisible wound. But I hope you and your family will be comforted by the knowledge that Brent was loved and respected by almost all those who came into contact with him. Once again, our deepest condolences.”<sup>30</sup>

Later, however, James Gregory took advantage of his relationship with Mandela by writing a book — later made into a film — which contained several inaccuracies

27. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org>.

28. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/prison/swart.html>.

29. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/prison/swart.html>.

30. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org>.



and distortions about his interactions with Mandela. Mandela's authorised biographer Anthony Sampson wrote: "Many ex-Robben Islanders baulked at [Mandela's] more extreme acts of forgiveness . . . And they were baffled by his leniency towards his former warder James Gregory when he published his book *Goodbye Bafana*, promoted with the help of a letter from Mandela thanking him for the 'wonderful hours that we spent together'. Gregory had 'hallucinated' in many of his accounts, Mandela said privately, and Gregory himself admitted that he had used 'author's license'; more seriously, he had abused his role by disclosing confidential personal details."<sup>31</sup>

On the subject of warders Mandela had befriended one earlier at Robben Island. Christo Brand came to Robben Island in 1978 as a pro-apartheid 18-year-old white prison guard. His experiences with the dignified Mandela brought him to change his views about Mandela and apartheid. He told *The Observer*, London, "When I came to the prison, Nelson Mandela was already 60. He was down-to-earth and courteous. He treated me with respect and my respect for him grew. After a while, even though he was a prisoner, a friendship grew. It was a friendship behind bars," said Brand, of the relationship that transformed his life. Brand came to do "favours" for Mandela, smuggling in the bread and hair pomade that he liked and bringing him messages. He broke the rules to allow Mandela to hold his infant grandson. "Mandela was worried that I would get caught and be punished," said Brand. "He wrote to my wife telling her that I must continue my studies. Even as a prisoner he was encouraging a warder to study."

When Mandela was moved to Pollsmoor Prison in 1982, Brand was transferred there, too. Mandela visited Brand's home and met his wife. Mandela held Brand's young son, Riaan, when he was just a few months old. As the boy grew up, Mandela and fellow prisoner Walter Sisulu would give him chocolates. "My boy used to say, 'Let's go visit the old guys,' because he knew he would get sweets," said Brand. Mandela has written in his autobiography, "Once, one of the warders, a very pleasant young man named Warrant Officer Brand, actually took me to his family's flat and introduced me to his wife and children. From then on, I sent his children Christmas cards every year."<sup>32</sup>

Years later, after Mandela had retired as President, his education fund awarded a scholarship to Brand's son to study. "The bursary was to study to be an engineer. But my son decided he wanted to be a deep sea diver. I took him to meet Mandela. He told me that we must respect my son's wishes." said Brand.<sup>33</sup>

At the time of his release from prison he had this to say of his prison warders in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*: "Men like Swart, Gregory and Warrant

31. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org>.

32. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 635.

33. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/may/20/nelsonmandela>.

Officer Brand reinforced my belief in the essential humanity even of those who had kept me behind bars for the previous twenty-seven and a half years.”<sup>34</sup>

Unlike many oppressed ANC activists who had a hatred for the whites, Mandela recognised that there was a good side in white people too. Narrating his experiences as a lawyer prior to his imprisonment, he said: “My colleagues and I did not want to speak to the apartheid rulers at all, but some of us did the type of work that brought us into contact with our oppressors. For instance, when blacks were forced to leave Johannesburg and go back to their homelands, a man would come to me and say, ‘Help me. I have lost my job. I have a wife and children in school, and I am now required to leave my home.’ As a lawyer, I would go to the top authorities and say, ‘Look, I’m approaching you as a human, and here is my problem. I have to rely on you.’ Invariably, the person would allow the man to look for a job. So I discovered even before I went to jail that apartheid was not run by people who were monolithic in their approach. Some of them didn’t even believe in apartheid.”<sup>35</sup>

Over the years Mandela became a more complete, sensitive, considerate and empathetic man. Gillian Slovo, novelist and daughter of Joe Slovo — an anti-apartheid activist and a close comrade of Mandela — writes of Mandela: “Emerging from prison Mandela seemed to delight in the company of children. My daughter was often on his knee or being shown by him the way to the toilet in the middle of a formal meal. A friend’s child, whose father Mandela had removed from the cabinet, got an early-morning call from him apologising for the pain that this demotion must have caused her. And, when visiting London, Mandela invited us three sisters to come to lunch during which he spoke shamefacedly of how long he had been out of touch and how wrong this was — since he, with the death of Joe, had become our father.”<sup>36</sup>

Mandela loved children. In fact one of his regrets in prison was that he never could hear a baby cry or hold a child’s hand. In 1995 Mandela launched the Mandela Children’s Fund after a personal encounter with homeless children in Cape Town who had come to see him to explain their plight. He was so moved that he vowed to help children and immediately launched the fund, which had collected more than \$25 million and had helped hundreds of children. Mandela donated a third of his presidential salary to the fund during his five years in office. Many business executives matched his example and some bettered it.<sup>37</sup>

Mandela’s compassion extended to all, especially those who were suffering. After his political retirement he worked for the terminally ill. In an interview he revealed that at a meeting he had attended there was a terminally ill patient. “I embraced her and I told the crowd: ‘Don’t isolate people who are suffering from terminal diseases, because that alone kills people far more than the disease itself.’

34. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 672.

35. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

36. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

37. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes).

When somebody discovers that they are no longer regarded as a human being, he or she loses the will to fight, whereas if they are supported, especially by their friends and people they rely upon, they fight back.”<sup>38</sup> Mandela adds: “And I tell them about my own example when I had tuberculosis in jail. When I was told this by the hospital, I went and told my friend Walter Sisulu. Walter called me aside and said, ‘Madiba, you must not tell us about this — it’s personal.’ I said, ‘What is personal? The whole of the hospital knows about it!’ Years later when I had cancer of the prostate I called a press conference and I made light about it. People like that type of thing — not to be too serious when discussing this question.”<sup>39</sup>

Zackie Achmat, an anti-apartheid activist, wrote:

In July 2002 I became ill with a lung infection. I was in bed and could not move. I was refusing to take any antiretroviral drugs because I believed that the government of South Africa should roll out treatment to all affected South Africans who wanted to get the drugs. The government was dragging its feet.

I had only met Mandela once before, at an awards ceremony. One day, while I was lying in bed, the telephone rang and my housemate said to me: “Zackie, it’s Nelson Mandela on the line.” In his usual blunt manner he said: “Zackie, I want you to take your medicine.” I told him that I did not do business that way and that what I was doing was part of a principled stand. Why should I live when millions were being allowed to die?

He did not give up. He sent Jakes Gerwel, one of his closest confidantes, to negotiate with me and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). His view was that I should take the drugs and live to continue the fight. In December that year he came to Cape Town and saw me and my comrades in the TAC. . . .

Mandela was a surrogate father for me — as he was for many young South Africans. He was a mythical figure for us activists.<sup>40</sup>

After his release from prison Mandela was globally the most celebrated man but he never let success get to his head. He was an epitome of compassion, warmth and humility. Despite his busy schedule he even gave his time, warmth and attention to the common citizen; here are four such incidents:

Pie-Pacifique of Rwanda, writes: “I arrived in South Africa as a refugee in 2001 and, after becoming a Mandela Rhodes Scholar at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, I had the privilege of meeting Nelson Mandela on three occasions. When I first met him in 2006, I was so nervous, but he had such a jovial energy that made me feel special, as if he was focused on me alone. Very few people have that gift.”<sup>41</sup>

38. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=results](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=results).

39. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=results](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=results).

40. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

41. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25266397>.

Richard Moore from Manchester, UK, says: “I later met Mr. Mandela in August 1997 at a trade show in Gaborone, Botswana. I was with my four-year-old son Josh, who was the only child in the room, when a bodyguard came up to me and asked if I would mind if Mr. Mandela greeted my son and I, and that he would probably want to pick my son up and talk to him. I obviously had no objection. He came through the crowd, spoke to me and took Josh from my arms and spoke to him for a couple of minutes. I have met presidents before but I can honestly say Mr. Mandela was the most genuinely humble man I have ever met. He had no air or superiority, pride or arrogance whatsoever.”<sup>42</sup>

Marcelle Feenstra, of Pretoria, South Africa tells BBC: “Madiba was a very special man. My husband and I met him at a business conference not long after his inauguration as president in 1994. It was an uncertain time. But he was so warm. He was busy speaking to someone else and he shook my husband’s hand and held it until the other person had finished talking, just to make us feel important. He touched many people’s lives in this manner. Everyone was special to him.”<sup>43</sup>

Sanjiv VEDI of Cardiff, Wales, who saw Mandela at an event at Johannesburg Cathedral writes: “After the memorial I approached him and asked if I could speak to him. He was going to another meeting but we sat in his car and we talked for an hour about politics in South Africa and what the government was doing. He treated me like I was more important than anyone else. It was a moment that I will cherish for the rest of my days.”<sup>44</sup>

Mandela’s warmth also extended to those who were despised by certain political quarters. Northern Ireland’s Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams, visited South Africa in June 1995, almost a year after the IRA cessation. He writes: “Walter Sisulu, Cyril Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, Cheryl Carolus and many other leaders of the ANC made us very welcome. However, for all in our group the highlight of our visit was the meeting with Madiba. He was self-effacing in his humour, relaxed and focused. As ever the British government, and sections of the British media, had made much about whether or not there would be a handshake, a photograph and so on. The [John] Major government had lobbied hard for Mandela not to meet me. We shook hands in his office: ‘Ah, comrade Gerry,’ he said. ‘I’ll not wash my hand for a week.’”<sup>45</sup> Apparently Mandela understood and respected the travails and sacrifices that a revolutionary leader has to endure. Adams later wrote, “Nelson Mandela remains one of my heroes and was, in my view, the greatest political leader of our time.”<sup>46</sup>

42. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25266397>.

43. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25266397>.

44. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25266397>.

45. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

46. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

Former British prime minister, Gordon Brown, revealed that Mandela was a very personable and kind human being. He told ITV News that Mandela had phoned to congratulate him the day after his son's birth. Brown said: "We'd both lost children and we had what was not a statesman to statesman conversation but a father to father conversation. That was Mandela all the time — the personal care he took in his relationships, his great sense of humour . . . he was just a very complete and warm human being."<sup>47</sup>

Mandela also had a fine sense of humour and this gave him an added human touch. Mac Maharaj writes: "He is possessed of a great sense of fun and much impish mischievousness. It cannot be otherwise for anyone who loves life."<sup>48</sup> When Mandela's warder and cook in his last prison, Jack Swart was asked about his favourite memory of Mandela; he replied, "His sense of humour."<sup>49</sup> Helen Suzman, a liberal parliamentarian remarked that Mandela "always had a remarkable sense of humour."<sup>50</sup> Here are two amusing incidents.

Alan Titchmarsh, gardener and broadcaster, who claimed "making a garden for Nelson Mandela will remain one of my proudest boasts", writes of an amusing incident:

As I showed him round the garden he kept muttering "Gee-whizz!" like an amazed schoolboy. We stayed for tea and cakes, and chatted about this and that. "What do you remember about being released?" I asked.

"I remember my first public meeting," he replied. "It happened to be a church meeting. We were outdoors. There were people all down the valleys and up the hills; wherever I looked, all I could see was faces. There were thousands of them."

Then he looked at me and winked. "It took them two weeks to count the collection."<sup>51</sup>

Writing in *Time*, the U2 singer, Bono said:

He could charm the birds off the trees — and cash right out of wallets. He told me once how Margaret Thatcher had personally donated £20,000 to his foundation. "How did you do that?" I gasped. The Iron Lady, who was famously frugal, kept a tight grip on her purse. "I asked," he said with a laugh. "You'll never get what you want if you don't ask." Then he lowered his voice conspiratorially and said her donation had nauseated some of his cohorts.

47. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-tributes-and-reaction>.

48. <http://www.politicsweb.co.za>.

49. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/11/mandela-jail-warden-terrorist-brother-jack-swart>.

50. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

51. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

“Didn’t she try to squash our movement?” they complained. His response: “Didn’t De Klerk crush our people like flies? And I’m having tea with him next week . . . He’ll be getting the bill.”<sup>52</sup>

Mandela was already 75 when he became President, and relied heavily on his deputy, Thabo Mbeki, for the running of the day-to-day administration of the government. Mandela’s role as a head of state was more of that of a statesman at which he was outstanding. In his term, he made only modest progress in fulfilling the modest goals he had set for housing, education and jobs. However if we look back and compare the conditions in South Africa today, his leadership in being the moral conscience of the country was a critical one. More critical was Mandela’s policy of compassion and reconciliation which saved the country from a blood bath and ushered it into a period of democracy, human rights and tolerance.

Mandela became the rarest thing in African history, a one-term President who chose not to run for office again. Like George Washington, he understood that every step he made would be a template for others to follow. Later when he was told, “You served as president of South Africa for only one term of office. And you have famously observed ‘some leaders don’t know when to leave’”. Mandela replied, “It is not good for any democracy when its leader remains in power so long. However, this is something for the people of the country in question to decide.”<sup>53</sup>

Managing editor of *Time* Richard Stengel writes: “I also wanted to talk to him about leadership. Mandela is the closest thing the world has to a secular saint, but he would be the first to admit that he is something far more pedestrian: a politician. He overthrew apartheid and created a non-racial democratic South Africa by knowing precisely when and how to transition between his roles as warrior, martyr, diplomat and statesman. Uncomfortable with abstract philosophical concepts, he would often say to me that an issue ‘was not a question of principle; it was a question of tactics.’ He is a master tactician.”<sup>54</sup>

After leaving office, Mandela continued to lend his tireless support to the fight against social injustice and poverty in South Africa and beyond through fundraising organisations such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund. In the diplomatic field, Mandela worked patiently to mediate in conflict-stricken Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2007, he formed The Elders, a group of widely respected former statesmen and world leaders dedicated to bringing their expertise, experience and moral authority to bear on the world’s most pressing political and social issues. Members included Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

52. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-tributes-and-reaction>.

53. [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=results](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=results).

54. [content.time.com/time/subscriber/article](http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article) (Interview with *Time* magazine).

Nobel Peace Prize winner and South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "He was renowned the world over as the undisputed icon of forgiveness and reconciliation, and everybody wanted a piece of him. We South Africans basked in his reflected glory."<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere the Archbishop said: "Was he a saint? Not if a saint is entirely flawless. I believe he was saintly because he inspired others powerfully and revealed in his character, transparently, many of God's attributes of goodness: compassion, concern for others, and a desire for peace, forgiveness and reconciliation."<sup>56</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

55. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-tributes-and-reaction>.

56. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25321561>.

## AUROVILLE — A CITY FOR THE FUTURE

[The book *Auroville — A City for the Future* by Anu Majumdar captures the ideals and the realities of Auroville, with its double focus on the people who are part of this adventure and at the same time on the broader picture and the deeper significance that Auroville holds for the world.

We will be featuring in the pages of our journal some extracts (the omissions in the text are indicated by three dots) as well as some chapter-length selections. Not all chapters have been covered, but the chapter numbers have been retained for the convenience of those who would like to go to the original.

The references to passages from the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works have been updated by using the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM).

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*There should be somewhere upon earth a place . . .*<sup>1</sup>

\*

*"I invite you to the great adventure."*

*It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails — a real adventure, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored.*<sup>2</sup>

\*

*Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.*

*But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.*

*(Auroville Charter)*

The Mother

1. The Mother, *Mother on Auroville*, 1993, 1999, p. 6.

2. CWM, Vol. 9, p. 152.



## 1. THE DESTINED MEETING

*But now the destined spot and hour were close;  
Unknowing she had neared her nameless goal . . .*<sup>3</sup>

It began one afternoon in Pondicherry, just over a hundred years ago. On 29 March 1914, a French lady, thirty-six years of age, stepped out of her hotel still in her winter clothes, and made her way to No. 41, Rue François Martin. At that hour the streets of the little French colonial town were deserted. Two streets away, the Bay of Bengal lapped quietly against the shore. She had arrived in the morning, after three weeks of journeying across the sea, and news of their arrival had already been sent. She wanted to meet him alone.

She was Mirra Alfassa. He, Aurobindo Ghose, . . . soon to be known as Sri Aurobindo.

A few days prior to her departure from Paris, Mirra wrote in her diary: “. . . I turn towards the future . . . What it holds in store for us I do not know . . .”<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

Sri Aurobindo lived in No. 41, Rue François Martin then, with a group of young disciples who had followed him to Pondicherry. . . .

On 29 March, at 3.30 in the afternoon, the streets were silent in the little seaside town. Mirra walked up to the door of No. 41, which stood at the junction of two streets, and crossed the small courtyard to a staircase. The house was empty at that hour, the disciples had already left for their afternoon game of football. As Mirra climbed the stairs, Sri Aurobindo emerged from his room and came to the head of the stairs. Mirra froze. The vision attire exactly!

From the age of fifteen Mirra had experienced repeated visions of a dark figure, bare-chested, dressed in a sort of oriental attire, a white cloth draped over his shoulder. She had even invented a name for this mysterious figure: Krishna. Sri Aurobindo stood before her now, in a white dhoti, the end cloth draped easily over his bare, dark shoulder. Just like the ‘Krishna’ of her childhood visions. His gaze seemed far till he looked down at her. It was an instant spiritual recognition. The next day, her diary entry would state unequivocally:

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.<sup>5</sup>

3. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 389.

4. CWM, Vol. 1, p. 87.

5. CWM, Vol. 1, p. 113.

Sri Aurobindo was more cryptic. *Soul kinship*, a notebook entry would say soon after, but his epic poem, *Savitri*, would reveal far more of that meeting in the years to come.

Attracted as in heaven star by star,  
They wondered at each other and rejoiced  
And wove affinity in a silent gaze.  
A moment passed that was eternity's ray,  
An hour began, the matrix of new Time.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

I sometimes wonder what my life would have been if that meeting had not happened. All of us in Auroville, consciously or unconsciously, have been born of that matrix. Without that flash of soul recognition would Auroville ever have existed? He *whom we saw yesterday, is on earth* . . . Without them, would it be there for us, a place to discover, step into by chance, or simply be born in and take it all for granted?

### 3. THE FIRST ANCHOR

*O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.  
One shall descend and break the iron Law,  
Change Nature's doom by the lone spirit's power.*<sup>7</sup>

Pondicherry became Sri Aurobindo's place of retreat, his cave of tapasya, though not of the ascetic kind, but a 'special brand' all his own. It was no longer only India's freedom that concerned him. That India would be free he no longer doubted. The wheel had been set in motion, and it was only a matter of time. What India would do with her freedom concerned him far more. How would she grow? How would her spiritual knowledge impact humanity? India's destiny demanded a sadhana for the Earth's consciousness. . . .

\*

Even as Mirra was mapping out a programme with the Cosmique group in Paris, Sri Aurobindo drew up his plans in Pondicherry. While she focused on the need for an ideal society, the question remained: What power would allow such a change to happen?

6. CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 399.

7. CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 346.

Sri Aurobindo was tracking that force. The Vedas offered him powerful new revelations. They were certainly not ritualistic mutterings of madmen, not rigid religious doctrine, nor obscure, mystical nature worship. He dug deeper through etymological labyrinths of the texts and into his own inner experiences to recover a far more sophisticated symbolism and a very different meaning from what was conventionally accepted. This new interpretation, verified by experience, was at once yogic and psychological, revealing the Rig Veda, in particular, as a workbook of self-perfection that could open the doors of human evolution. Sri Aurobindo kept a meticulous record of his experiences during this period in Pondicherry, documenting experiments and spiritual developments every day. These were noted precisely, sometimes by the hour, much like a scientist, keeping systematic track of his discoveries — of the results, the successes and even of the failures. He was charting a map of uncharted territories.

I am concerned with the earth and not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental Yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object. The supramental is simply the Truth-Consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter.<sup>8</sup>

Though nothing was evident on the surface, Mirra's arrival would lead to the next step that he had been waiting for.

Sri Aurobindo's work had by now reached its first culmination. His interpretation of the Vedas was complete, so was his philosophy of the Upanishads and his commentary on the Gita. His theory of Integral Yoga had also fallen in place, and in addition, he had also surveyed social and political history in terms of human evolution and also chalked out a treatise on the future of poetry. The main philosophical corpus of his work was ready, it needed a next step.

Mirra's June 1914 diary entry is revealing:

It is a veritable work of creation we have to do . . . so that this Force, unknown to the earth till today, may manifest . . .<sup>9</sup>

It was a promise they had both undertaken to fulfil.

8. CSWA, Vol. 29, pp. 482-83.

9. CWM, Vol. 1, p. 173.

In us must take place the union of the two wills and two currents, so that from their contact may spring forth the illuminating spark.<sup>10</sup>

Then Mirra came, Sri Aurobindo would say simply, and opened the way for a material realisation.

Without her, no organised manifestation would have been possible.<sup>11</sup>

\*

The opening chapters of Sri Aurobindo's seminal works appeared in the first issue of *Arya*. It had *The Life Divine*, *The Secret of the Vedas*, translation and commentaries on the Isha Upanishad and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, four or five books being written parallelly. . . .

A few weeks later, Mirra made another journal entry, this one carried by a confident resolve and an enigmatic promise that she would echo some forty years later:

A new light shall break upon the earth.  
A new world shall be born,  
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.<sup>12</sup>

\*

In 1915 things changed abruptly. The Richards were forced to leave Pondicherry because of the war, but papers eventually revealed that the French government deported them under extreme pressure from the British due to the Richards' close association with Sri Aurobindo . . .

From 1914 the *Arya* progressed steadily covering the entire range of his work. In the *Essays on the Gita* he gave an indication of the direction and synthesis his search was taking:

We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development . . . and larger synthesis. We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins . . . or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. . . . We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future. A mass of new material is flowing into us . . . All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis . . .<sup>13</sup>

10. *Ibid.*

11. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry, 2001, p. 6.

12. CWM, Vol. 1, p. 252.

13. CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 10.

Occasionally, he would write to Mirra about his articles.

I have begun . . . a number of articles on the Ideal of Human Unity. I intend to proceed very cautiously . . . leading the intelligence of the reader gradually towards the deeper meaning of unity, — especially to discourage the idea that mistakes uniformity and mechanical association for unity.<sup>14</sup>

Then suddenly, in November 1915, they were discussing a plan.

A centre of light, not necessarily translated into the terms of a physical grouping, but in which a few can stand, an increasing circle of luminosity into which more & more can enter, and outside the twilight world struggling with the light, this seems to be the inevitable course.<sup>15</sup>

Such plans do not come up for discussion again for quite some years. Their work still needed a gigantic step of consciousness.

The Richards moved from France to Japan about a year later and remained there till the war ended after which Mirra made arrangements to return. She reached Pondicherry on 24 April 1920, never to leave Sri Aurobindo again. Mirra and Richard would, however, now part ways.

This final return also brought a culmination to the first meeting.

We were standing side by side . . . gazing out through the open window, and then *together*, at exactly the same moment, we felt: Now the Realisation will be accomplished . . . from that moment on there was nothing to say — no words, nothing. We knew it was *that*.<sup>16</sup>

It was time for the real work to start.

The number of disciples at the Ashram had grown in the meantime. . . .

Mirra's return in 1920 brought another important change. Sri Aurobindo now acknowledged her as the Mother, an equal spiritual partner in the work. His real sadhana had waited for her return, but as yet, very few understood this. The *Arya* was put to rest in 1921. The theoretical philosophy was now available for the world, the first anchor was cast. The actual Supramental descent remained. He needed to draw back, the work was pressing.

14. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 286.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 287-88.

16. The Mother's conversation of 20 December 1961; *The Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 2.

By 1926, an air of expectancy hung over the Ashram. Many people felt it like a pressure above their heads, as if something was about to happen. On 24 November, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother called the disciples for a meditation to announce the descent of the Overmind. Some of the disciples present that evening felt a surcharge of energy in the atmosphere, a few witnessed a flood of light from above and most of all, the presence of a great beauty.

Sri Aurobindo has explained the Overmind as the passage through which one passed from Mind to Supermind. The Overmind was the plane of the Gods, or the highest consciousness one could achieve before transcending the mental system. Beyond Overmind lay the planes of the Supermind.

That was the conscious force he was tracking which was essential for their work.

“The conditions in which men live on earth are the result of their state of consciousness.” The Mother would say, “To seek to change these conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera.”<sup>17</sup>

After 24 November, 1926, Sri Aurobindo handed full charge of running the Ashram to the Mother and retreated into seclusion. This met with some bewilderment at first and even strong resistance from a certain section of his followers. . . . To them Sri Aurobindo would respond:

The Mother and I are one and equal. . . . The Asram is the Mother’s creation and would not have existed but for her . . . Try to understand this elementary truth, if you want to have any right relation or attitude towards the Mother.<sup>18</sup>

. . . But for all this his work continued in seclusion. Meetings with his disciples had also ceased by then, including evening talks with his closest disciples. However, he continued to communicate and advise them through letters, or else, through the Mother. What was afoot?

“When you follow the ascending path, the work is relatively easy,”<sup>19</sup> the Mother would explain later. This was the work of establishing a permanent connection with the Divine Consciousness that was beyond all personality. But theirs was the descending path, now being forged, to bring the Divine Consciousness “down into Matter”. The work was immense and never before attempted. In 1931, she offered an inkling:

17. CWM, Vol. 12, p. 39.

18. CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 82-83.

19. The Mother’s conversation of 19 May 1959; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 1.

The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has called the Supramental . . . it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. . . . Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.<sup>20</sup>

They were building the bridge to a new life on earth.

\*

In May 1979 I caught a dusty local bus heading out of Pondicherry. The bus trundled northward, leaving the town behind and drove past small settlements, past village clusters, towards open fields. I got off at Koot Road, as the conductor had instructed, and looked across.

There was nothing out there. It was two in the afternoon on 29 May and I don't remember if it was hot as I started walking past the empty fields. Nothing seemed to grow there. I passed a small collection of village houses and was watched by a group of curious children. "Watisyourname? Watisyournativeplace?" They waved. I waved. I wasn't sure if my name or native place mattered anymore, because for some inexplicable reason joy filled my heart, my limbs, and my mind was a splendid blank. I had no idea where the road was leading, or if I was on the right track, there were no directions anywhere. I asked two men cycling by. "Yes, yes," they nodded and pointed farther ahead. I went on, past more fields, past an old temple, following an avenue of tall coconut palms, now a little uncertain. Where was I going? A motorcycle whizzed by. There had to be something out there. That is when I noticed a few village huts a little ahead beside a small cluster of trees. Behind them something loomed, a massive spherical shell of concrete against the clear blue sky. My heart lifted, I was on the right track!

Ahead of me lay Auroville, the City of the Future. The City at the Service of the Truth. The City of Dawn. The first realisation of human unity based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. The City the Earth Needs . . .

I hitched up my bag and kept walking. Where the hell was the model town?

#### 4. A NEW WORLD IS BORN

*If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too*

20. CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 178-79.

*imperfect an expression of the spirit, mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation.*

Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*<sup>21</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's work would accelerate around 1934.

The supramental Force is descending, but it has not yet taken possession of the body or of matter — there is still much resistance.<sup>22</sup>

he wrote to a disciple. As his sadhana plunged deeper from the mental to vital planes and deeper still, into the physical and the subconscious levels, it threw up a massive range of difficulties not just from inner and occult levels but from deeper, often unconscious levels of resistance of those around them.

“The thing can still be brought down as far as the mental and vital planes,” the Mother would confirm. “With Sri Aurobindo we went down below Matter, right into the Subconscious and even the Inconscient planes of the being.”<sup>23</sup>

“Very beastly — these forces,” Sri Aurobindo would write to a disciple. “One can't advance a single step without their throwing their shells and stink-bombs. However like General Joffre, I advance. ‘Nous progressâmes.’”<sup>24</sup>

Each plane of being had to be progressively opened and purified to be able to receive the consciousness that was waiting to descend. As long as things were blocked nothing could come in and no transformation was possible. It was easier to work at the mental and vital levels, but the real difficulty lay on the physical and subconscious planes. However, any real change made at these levels would be the most effective and lasting, once the resistance was crossed.

“... when you come down to the body, when you attempt to make it take one step forward . . .” the Mother confirmed, “just a little step! — everything starts grating; it's like stepping on an anthill. The path is difficult.”<sup>25</sup>

And certainly from Sri Aurobindo's letters of that period, there was enough evidence of revolts and quarrels, depressions, doubts and cynicism, illnesses and misunder-

21. CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 879.

22. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 328.

23. The Mother's conversation of 19 May 1959; *The Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1.

24. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 336.

25. The Mother's conversation of 19 May 1959; *The Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1.



standings, as well as attacks on the Ashram, all different ways of these forces wanting to disrupt and delay the work. But persist they did, and by 1936 the new consciousness seemed to be on the brink of arrival.

That same year, the Mother initiated, of all things, the construction of Golconde and invited the Czech-American architect Antonin Raymond to design it. Golconde came to be recognised as the first modern building in India, ostensibly built for the Ashram disciples. Why such a daunting enterprise at such a critical moment of their sadhana? Was it a test run for something else? As it happens, she even asked Raymond to prepare a city plan. Years later, she would speak of it as a plan for the first Auroville. Clearly both of them were expecting the 'connection' to take place, and she was going ahead with preparations for the model town.

What happened?

Sri Aurobindo's sadhana had now touched rock bottom, the subconscious level, where the forces of resistance were particularly strong and all massed together, not just in the Ashram but also in the world. Hitler was rising rapidly in Germany and gathering power. Guernica had been bombed sending shockwaves across Europe, and by the end of 1938, things seemed to be heading for a full-blown catastrophe. The world was not ready for such a war, the Mother said, it had to be held off. The dangers were immense, as immense as the progress in consciousness now being made.

The Supramental force had begun its descent. He had the tail end of the Consciousness now, Sri Aurobindo wrote to a close disciple in March 1937, but not yet, the head. Though the Supramental needed no protection, he still had to watch over the Ashram and of course, the Mother, as the forces had grown particularly difficult and active. But he had overlooked his own physical protection, and in November, adversity struck. Sri Aurobindo met with a sudden fall and broke his leg, and the work was seemingly disrupted.

The Second World War broke out within months and Sri Aurobindo's attention, as well as that of the Mother's, shifted at once. The plan was shelved, the city seemingly forgotten. Only later people would learn of their action during the war, through the story of John Kelly, a soldier in that war, and through the letters and talks with his disciples during those years.

Defeating Hitler was of the utmost importance, whatever Subhash Chandra Bose or Gandhi may have thought then. Sri Aurobindo gave his open support to the Allied forces and urged others to follow. His support shocked many leaders and even drew sharp criticism from some of his disciples. India was fighting for its own freedom, how could he, as one of the forerunners of the freedom struggle, propose such a thing? Were they proposing to support Hitler? Sri Aurobindo would ask in return. Did they understand the implications? If Hitler succeeded there would be no hope left for India's freedom, nor for many other nations still under colonial rule.

If the totalitarian Powers win, there will indeed be a new world-order, — it may be in the end, a unification; but it will be a new order of naked brute Force, repression and exploitation . . . You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others, or even for India; . . . It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if this one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth . . .<sup>26</sup>

“. . . freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the Spirit,”<sup>27</sup> Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, all three a prerequisite for the consciousness to grow. No one heard of the model town again, till much later. But the work never stopped, even if invisible to most eyes.

Throughout his seclusion Sri Aurobindo remained closely informed about the freedom movement but refused to intervene directly, his work had shifted to a different sphere. Here is a brief extract from a conversation with the then very young disciple, A. B. Purani, still undecided if he should work for a revolutionary movement to free India or follow the path of yoga:

“Perhaps it may not be necessary to resort to revolutionary activity to free India,” he said.

“But without that how is the British Government to go from India?” I asked him.

“That is another question; but if India can be free without revolutionary activity, why should you execute the plan? It is better to concentrate on yoga — the spiritual practice,” he replied. . . .

“But even supposing that I grant Sadhana to be of greater importance . . . my difficulty is that I feel intensely that I must do something for the freedom of India.”

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for two or three minutes. “Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free?”

“Who can give such an assurance?” I could feel the echo of doubt and challenge in my own question.

“Suppose I give you the assurance?”<sup>28</sup>

Despite this Sri Aurobindo declined several calls from Nehru, Gandhi and Tagore to lead the movement again, even admonishing his own disciples for pushing such ideas in an Ashram journal.

26. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 460, 463.

27. CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 570.

28. A. B. Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2007, pp. 17-18.

I must insist that the last words, “till we put ourselves in the care of some Rishis among leaders” shall go out. . . . it is evident that the eyes of your readers will turn at once towards Pondicherry and consider that it is a claim for my appointment either to the place filled so worthily by C.R. or the kindred place admirably occupied by Nehru. . . . So out with the ‘Rishi’.<sup>29</sup>

However, long before the Hindu-Muslim riots broke out he could see that Gandhi’s use of the communal principle was dangerous and would not only lead to a fissure between Hindus and Muslims and be used by the British to divide but also widen the fissure between caste Hindus and Harijans.

Apart from his public stand in support of the Allied forces on the Second World War, he made another public appeal, this time to ask for support for the Cripps proposal for an undivided Dominion status for India. The proposal was being rejected by Gandhi and Nehru, as there were serious flaws. Though aware of this, Sri Aurobindo still pushed for the proposal, even sending out telegrams to several leaders asking them to resist partition and to work out a solution:

SETTLEMENT INDIA BRITAIN URGENT . . . GRAVE PERIL MENACING  
FUTURE INDIA. IS THERE NO WAY WHILE RESERVING RIGHT  
REPUDIATE RESIST PARTITION . . .<sup>30</sup>

His call was rejected by Gandhi and others, who wondered why he was interfering, but Sri Aurobindo’s urgency evidently came from foreknowledge. For beyond the obvious shortcomings of the proposal lay a much greater concern, the possibility of continued conflict, the hardening of religious division, the danger of continual manipulation by outside powers and endless suffering on both sides. All of this is history by now, but it was not readily understood at that time.

Sri Aurobindo lived to see one major realisation nevertheless.

August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age

he said in a little-known All India Radio broadcast to the nation on that day. The day, 15 August, also marked his own birthday.

. . . it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence . . . as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps . . . Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then

29. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 520-21.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 470.

they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement.<sup>31</sup>

The message came to be known as the Five Dreams. The first dream was that of a revolutionary movement that would create a free and united India.

India today is free but she has not achieved unity. . . . the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. . . . if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled . . . This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action . . . In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form . . .<sup>32</sup>

The second dream was about the resurgence of Asia; the third, of a free world union where “Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy”,<sup>33</sup> and allow a spirit of oneness to take hold of the world. This in turn would correspond with the fourth dream, of India’s spiritual contribution to the world. The fifth and final dream was of a next step in the evolution of consciousness.

They were, in fact, visions for a new world: politically, socially, spiritually, for hinged on India’s freedom he saw an evolutionary pivot for humanity.

Sri Aurobindo passed away two years later, on 5 December 1950. A few weeks before his death he would add a last segment to his epic poem *Savitri*:

. . . Even if he seems to leave her to her lone strength,  
Even though all falters and falls and sees an end . . .  
Even on a brink where Death alone seems close  
And no human strength can hinder or can help.  
Think not to intercede with the hidden Will,  
Intrude not twixt her spirit and its force  
But leave her to her mighty self and Fate.<sup>34</sup>

He was leaving his work in the Mother’s hands now. The Supramental descent was yet to be achieved, the last hard passage, still had to be broken through.

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.<sup>35</sup>

31. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 478.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 478-79.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 480.

34. CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 461-62.

35. CWSA, Vol. 17, p. 9.

Plunging through the lines of the *Isha Upanishad*, Sri Aurobindo had drafted interpretations titled *The Life Divine*, prior to the publication of *Arya*. Was the *law of the truth*, the next stage of Consciousness? The *Arya* had laid out his philosophy and yoga starting from the Vedas and a knowledge that behind the appearances of the universe lay a greater Reality; to the different ranges of Being and Consciousness, that were veiled in the present status of the world. However, this veiled Consciousness was involved in earth matter, and evolution was the method by which it could be released into Life and Mind. But it waited for a still greater release of consciousness, the Supramental.

The next step of the evolution then was the development of Supermind and Spirit as the leading powers of the conscious being. Integral yoga was in fact its concentrated and accelerated process. And ‘integral’ because it included the experience of the different paths of yoga: knowledge, bhakti, work and physical tapasya, in an evolution that arrived at a new position of human life beyond divisions, its Oneness founded on the Truth.

Sri Aurobindo had described the Supramental quite simply as a “different consciousness and power beyond the mental limit.”<sup>36</sup> “The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence.”<sup>37</sup>

Was this why it was so necessary to anchor it before the model town could begin? Let us look at the Mother’s explanation:

Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of the Truth. . . . It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

It was the power she had been looking for, right from the start . . .

The Mother did not let go of the tail after Sri Aurobindo passed away in 1950. The work descended deeper, to the cellular level, at times physically demanding, at times fraught with severe occult resistances that had to be traversed. But by 1953, she was sharing a stunning piece of cosmic news.

There are, in the history of the earth, moments of transition when things that have existed for thousands of years must give way to those that are about to manifest. . . . We are at precisely such a turning-point in the world’s history. . . . A great luminous consciousness broods over the earth, creating a kind of stir in

36. CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 146.

37. CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 558.

38. CWM, Vol. 3, p. 173.

its atmosphere. All who are open receive a ripple from this eddy, a ray of this light and seek to give form to it, each according to his capacity.<sup>39</sup>

A few months later, in 1954, she wrote a compact text that came to be known as *The Dream*.

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities. Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action. In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream.

39. CWM, Vol. 12, p. 72.

And yet this dream is in the course of becoming a reality . . .<sup>40</sup>

She was still waiting for the *indispensable conscious force* to make its advent on earth. Who else had any inkling of a luminous consciousness hovering over the earth or, of its spiralling eddies? Not our ordinary human eyes certainly. Yet she would say with confidence that this dream was already in preparation in the Ashram, and that

. . . we may one day be able to present to the world as a practical and effective way to emerge from the present chaos, to be born into a new life that is more harmonious and true.<sup>41</sup>

Something was imminent, though entirely unseen, for soon after she was circulating a message:

The Force is there waiting to be manifested, we must discover the new forms through which It can manifest.<sup>42</sup>

Together with Sri Aurobindo, she had set up a laboratory of evolution, no less, and was now preparing for a shift, quite literally, preparing to change worlds. There was a growing accumulation of power within, an intensification of aspiration for the earth, an unshaken endurance and a need so imperative, so free of all fear that nothing could resist any more. A year and a half later, in 1956, she gave a hint in her New Year message:

The greatest victories are the least noisy.

The manifestation of a new world is not proclaimed by beat of drums.<sup>43</sup>

The year 1956 was a leap year. On 29 February it happened quietly during an evening meditation at the Ashram. Echoing the *Isha Upanishad*, she spoke of a massive golden door that separated the material world from the Divine. The time had come to break it open. This momentous spiritual ‘action’ was hers finally to accomplish, and as she shattered the golden door standing between the two worlds ‘to pieces’ the Supramental Light, Force and Consciousness entered the earth’s atmosphere in an uninterrupted flow.

40. CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 93-94.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

42. CWM, Vol. 15, p. 91.

43. CWM, Vol. 15, p. 171.

. . . a new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new world* which is *born*.<sup>44</sup>

Can we ‘believe’ all this with our regular perceptions? For here we finally stand at a step further than our mental limit, at a threshold of verification only gained by experience, faith and eventually, by visible proof.

Many years before, in 1914, as the First World War raged across the trenches, she had made a promise, noted in her diary, a few weeks after the *Arya* was launched:

A new Light shall break upon the earth.  
A new world shall be born,  
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.<sup>45</sup>

Echoing that came a public fulfilment now:

A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.<sup>46</sup>

She had kept her promise.

Their work together had always been a steady, unshakable, one-pointed endeavour for the earth, without fanfare or ostentatious proclamations of victory. Now that the new consciousness was on earth, in its *subtle physical atmosphere*, it had to be worked out in all the details of life.

\* \* \*

The next phase plunged her further in the cellular level. “Each time a new element is introduced . . . it causes what may be called a ‘tearing of limits’”,<sup>47</sup> she was saying in 1956.

It is obvious that modern scientific perception is much closer to something corresponding to the new reality. . . . But even that will suddenly find itself completely outdated, surpassed, and probably overturned with the intrusion of something which was not in the universe that was studied. It is this change, this sudden transformation of the universal element that will quite certainly

44. CWM, Vol. 9, p. 150.

45. CWM, Vol. 1, p. 252.

46. CWM, Vol. 15, p. 95.

47. The Mother’s conversation of 18 May 1961; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 2.



bring about a kind of chaos in the perceptions, out of which a new knowledge will emerge . . .<sup>48</sup>

This new substance, spreading across the world had

a warmth, a power, a joy so intense that . . . A single moment, a single impulse of deep and true love, an instant of the understanding which lies in the divine Grace brings you much closer to the goal than all possible explanations.<sup>49</sup>

Her body was growing pervasive, ubiquitous as that new substance spread like a contagion everywhere, permeating everything: a mountain, a river, a house. But these cellular experiences could hardly be explained or understood with words yet. She experienced huge networks layered over the earth with points of light wherever it was growing conscious. The physical body was a physical continuum of the world, part of the Oneness that the world already was, spontaneously and constantly. The laws were changing, and would continue changing.

One of the first results of the supramental manifestation has been to give the body a freedom and an autonomy which it had never known . . . it is a new phenomenon in the body. The cells themselves have felt for the first time that they are free, that they have a power of decision . . . altogether a new vibration and disorders are mended . . .<sup>50</sup>

which could, for instance, either read like plain bad news for the medical industry, or a breakthrough for scientific knowledge.

The new consciousness was offering staggering possibilities for human existence. But despite available scientific knowledge all this was still quite hard to comprehend. It was still a period of transition,

where the two are entangled — where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed . . .

. . . it is a future . . . which has *begun*, but which will take some time to be realised integrally.<sup>51</sup>

48. Satprem: *The Mind of the Cells*, p. 27.

49. CWM, Vol. 9, p. 325.

50. 'Towards February 29, 1960', [Supplement to *Mother India*, February 1960], p. 200.

51. CWM, Vol. 9, p. 151.

During an evening discussion with students on 10 July 1957 about what the transition from the ‘old’ world to the new implies, the Mother recalled that Sri Aurobindo had described the ‘old world’ as a creation of the Overmind, the age of gods, and consequently of religions, of nations, with all the social, moral and political baggage they implied. At the summit of the Overmind is the idea of the unity of all religions. But to really grasp the Supramental consciousness a ‘reversal’ was needed to know and acknowledge the whole world as a Divine unity manifest in many forms.

Still, all this created considerable confusion, especially for those used to the more established methods in the study of Sri Aurobindo’s works and of yoga. But now that the new consciousness was manifest in the earth’s atmosphere, the ground rules were shifting. Oneness and multiplicity were now active at the cellular level, the universal level, from where things could really start to change. Unity was no longer an individual phenomenon, she would confirm, but a field of an ‘innumerable unity’. There was no one fixed process any longer, nor a single method. The effect of the supramental contagion was going to be multiple and infinitely varied.

Something further than the Ashram was needed to take things forward now. A sort of trial ground, where people would be willing to test and be tested by a Dream. Literally, a living cell of all humanity, a model town . . .

In 1965 someone asked the Mother:

Q: *Who has taken the initiative for the construction of Auroville?*

A: The Supreme Lord.<sup>52</sup>

If she was ready to start constructing the ‘model’ town at last, surely something must have happened. “Last year,” she had said in July 1957, “when I announced to you the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and light and force, I should have added that it was an event forerunner of the birth of a new world.”<sup>53</sup> A year later she was confident. “This new realisation is proceeding with what one might call a lightning speed.”<sup>54</sup> “If things go advancing at this speed,” she added, it was more than possible that Sri Aurobindo would be proved right:

“The supramental consciousness will enter a phase of realising power in 1967.”<sup>55</sup>

The year 1967 was a very active one, for Auroville started in February 1968.

\* \* \*

52. CWM, Vol. 13, p. 188.

53. CWM, Vol. 15, p. 100.

54. CWM, Vol. 9, p. 315.

55. *Ibid.*

Did the world sense any of this new and stupendous force permeating the atmosphere? News headlines usually miss such things. Yet the invisible new element had infiltrated the world like a contagion, slipping quietly under our skins, inside our heart, in our minds, right inside our breath. Was there any immediate impact, any noticeable response as the 1950s emerged from war and grew aware of a free Asia and Africa?

“. . . people may get the descent without noticing [it],” Sri Aurobindo had written to a disciple, and “feel the result only.”<sup>56</sup> People who were open, inwardly ready and receptive would probably sense the difference.

Around the world, certainly, a new breath was now in the air and before people realised what was happening, the 1950s turned over and the 1960s erupted across the world like spring. Answers were blowing in the wind. It was suddenly a new time in the world. There were new songs and ideas, new aspirations and experiments were in vogue everywhere, new designs, architectures, inventions and dreams. A strange, youthful euphoria spread across the world. Then in January 1967, for the very first time, people saw an image of the whole earth taken from space, a cloudy blue-green planet, utterly beautiful in the silent roar of space. It was obvious that every human being, black, white, brown or yellow, belonged inside that picture. A huge wave of freedom swept through the youth of the world along with many freedom movements. Everything was suddenly planetary or global. People began travelling as never before, crossing the world from west to east and east to west. Men landed on the moon and frontiers began breaking, quite literally. People were searching for new meanings, for emancipation, for new opportunities, and pushing through multiple doors as the idea of a common humanity on a shared planet began to assert itself for the first time, even if imperfectly.

\* \* \*

In her little room in Pondicherry, the Mother was busy, looking for a piece of land for the *model town*, now that the ‘connection’ was made. “Is it possible to find a spot where the embryo or seed of the future supramental world could be created?”<sup>57</sup>

The plan Raymond had made for her around 1938 was no longer adequate. She was looking for new forms, perhaps even for a new architect, for she did not contact Raymond again. “It is the concept of an ideal town . . . This supposes a kind of perfection, a kind of unity . . . and necessarily an exceptional beauty and a total harmony.”<sup>58</sup>

The descent of the new consciousness would hasten things, Sri Aurobindo had said, but it would not offer ready-made solutions. Instead, it would make things

56. CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 377.

57. The Mother’s conversation of 18 July 1961; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 2.

58. *Ibid.*

possible. What she needed now was a handful of earth, where this force could be anchored consciously, a place just big enough to allow a full-fledged evolutionary experiment.

By now the 1960s were in full swing with their great surge for freedom that saw hippies popping up everywhere, civil rights movements, feminist movements, student movements and anti-war protests. Dancers and athletes broke records, men walked on the Moon and a burgeoning environmental movement began to garner support. Yet, it was not a time without difficulty. An equal force seemed ready to swallow this freedom and its range of possibility. Liberty grew self-indulgent, its feel-good euphoria too often dependent on drugs that dissipated the surge of potent energy in its haze. The world began to see a rise in violence, criminality and covert warfare in the next decades. A politics of domination grew undercurrent, as did the manipulation of economies. The world that had flung open so many doors was starting to backtrack to business as usual and consolidate new hegemonies. A few decades later a virtual network would engulf the earth, but would not set it free.

There was a sense of urgency, the *model town* would have to take root without delay before the new consciousness dissipated unused, or was forced to go underground. “One would already have to conceive of a Power to be at once a protection against bad will and aggression” and prevent “infiltration or admixture, keeping the nucleus from falling back to an inferior creation.”<sup>59</sup> The danger of the new force in wrong hands was also real. “The confusion that now exists on earth is nothing in comparison with what may happen . . . if the sense of collective unity did not grow in proportion . . .”<sup>60</sup>

Despite all these challenges, the birth of the ideal town was not being compromised. On the contrary, it had to be founded by the law of its own truth: of a great beauty and unity in the world.

\* \* \*

The land was yet to be found. Somewhere, not too far away, an unknown plateau of parched red earth was waiting for the wind to start changing over it. Waiting to be found while different locations were explored in the next years.

Finally, in 1965, a place was identified, close to Pondicherry, off the road to Madras, on top of a hill, a barren windswept plateau. That was it. The Mother was delighted. “Have you heard of Auroville?” she asked in June 1965. “For a long time I had had a plan of an ‘ideal town’ . . .”<sup>61</sup> The next step now was to find an architect who could prepare a new model for the city. She had already written to

59. *Ibid.*

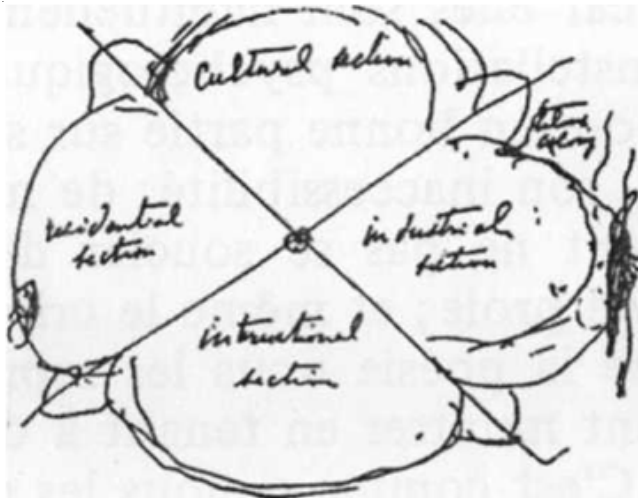
60. *Ibid.*

61. The Mother’s conversation of 26 June 1965; *The Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 6.

Roger Anger, a French architect, who had been visiting the Ashram for a few years. Though Roger admired Le Corbusier as a leading conceptual figure of the time, he was looking for something less stark and brutal. The Mother had noticed this when Roger returned from a trip to Chandigarh, somewhat disappointed, itching to do something different. Once the land was identified she wrote to Roger. She had a city to build, was he interested? Roger accepted at once. Delighted, the Mother wrote back on 30 March 1965: "I always knew you were the man for the project."<sup>62</sup>

Even before Roger arrived for the meeting, she had worked out her plans in great detail. To start him off she gave him a concept idea of the city with a drawing which marked a centre area and four sections, the cultural, international, industrial and residential zones, and overlapping intermediary zones. She had already envisioned the details of each zone, their relationship within the city and the rest of the world, people who would handle different aspects of the work. She had also thought of the problems. Water, she already knew, was the biggest difficulty and would take the longest to solve and would probably have to be brought up. Taking all this into account she was going ahead with her city. It was going to be an experiment at every level. After her meeting with Roger, he came up with a first report on which she gave her comments and work began on the architectural models which took over three years to finalise.

The project "engaged him passionately, commanding his special attention. It went on to absorb him totally."<sup>63</sup>



62. Anupama Kundoo, *Roger Anger: Research on Beauty*, Jovis, Berlin: 2009, p. 114.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Roger began shuttling between Paris and Auroville bringing her the models he was developing to receive feedback and discuss the different aspects and needs of the city. At that time Roger was in his early forties, a well-known architect, with several large projects and awards behind him and a full, successful career ahead. Here he was working without pay, sometimes pitching in his own funds for the project and bringing his team down from Paris so that they would understand the project and the context. Auroville fascinated him, “a totally unprecedented, psychological, social, educational and architectural experiment.”<sup>64</sup> Roger first came up with an elaborate rectangular model, which was rejected, and another hexagonal one that he was not himself satisfied with. The Mother was waiting for something else to emerge.

In April 1966, she seemed pleased with a model that came to be known as the ‘Nebula’, setting Roger in the right direction. It was a concentric plan with two rings, a fixed grid and straight avenues. It seemed to have captured her older formation based on her earlier plan reflecting her symbol that Raymond had worked on, but her concept drawing now, with the four zones, was different; she wanted something else, and Roger continued to work on the plan to break out of the fixed grid.

Though the Mother was happy the direction the Nebula model had taken and even used it for a first fund-raising brochure, it is important to note that this model was not her final choice. Roger continued working till the Nebula broke free and went into spin. It now had a number of curving arms, raised on a gradient which came to be called the Lines of Force.

The Lines of Force were introduced to take care of the spiralling movement she was looking for, as well as the proposed density but it was still not quite right. It had to open out more to allow a better balance of high and low densities and accommodate fifty thousand people.

Yet another model was presented in late 1967. It was an elegant and futuristic design referred to as the Macrostructure which had two sweeping Lines of Force facing each other across the centre. The drawings that accompanied this model had an outlying belt marked as Zone Agricole or, Agriculture Zone, an obvious forerunner of the Greenbelt, primarily to make the city food sufficient and to create a green buffer.

Once again she suggested changes, so that the view of the centre remained unobstructed. No one knew what would come in the centre, nor why it was so important for the city.

Aurofuture, the town planning office, had been set up across the street from the main Ashram building and Roger travelled back and forth between Paris and Pondicherry several times a year.

64. ‘Interview with Roger Anger, 1968’, *Auroville Architecture*, Prisma publications, 2011, p. 16.

The Mother had also been pleased to learn that a member of Roger's team had extensive contacts with communist Europe and was thrilled to pieces to be working on the project. That is precisely what she wanted to see happen in Auroville: the possibility for countries clashing with each other to build a pavilion there and work together in collaboration. The *why* of this has an interesting source — a message circulated less than a month after the Supramental Manifestation in February 1956:

The age of Capitalism and business is drawing to a close.

But the age of Communism, too, will pass. For Communism as it is preached is not constructive, it is a weapon to combat plutocracy. But when the battle is over and the armies are disbanded for want of employment, then Communism, having no more utility, will be transformed into something else that will express a higher truth.

We know this truth, and we are working for it so that it may reign upon earth.<sup>65</sup>

Again, this is a vision outside the ordinary timescale, it continues to exist despite all signs to the contrary. The model town was set to be a veritable field of transformation, but for that it had to be realised in its totality.

After the feedback on the Macrostructure model, Roger returned to Paris to give the plan a final push. In a later interview he recalled the great joy and inspiration that took hold of the entire team during the final weeks as they went into overdrive, working day and night towards the final model. Ideas flowed with great clarity and simplicity as everything fell into place. It was as though the team was guided. The model now had four overlapping zones held together by an inner ring. He flew back to India with the model in January 1968. The Mother approved. A few months later it earned a sobriquet: the Galaxy model, which even took Roger by surprise.

It happened after someone showed her a picture from NASA. "You know that photograph of the galaxy?" she would ask Satprem one day. "It's very lovely. One of the plans for Auroville is almost identical to it, and they did it without seeing the photograph . . ."<sup>66</sup> Such images, after all, were only just starting to be available to the world.

65. The Mother's note of 21 March, 1956; *The Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1.

66. The Mother's conversation of 20 April 1968; *The Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 9.

The luminous eddy of consciousness that she had seen spiralling above the earth's atmosphere had left its signature on the model. A turning point of the world's history had been anchored, a path cleared in the unknown for a leap into the future.

*(To be continued)*

ANU MAJUMDAR

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## POEMS FROM AUROVILLE

### NOT DYING

Grey men in grey suits  
Postured and polite, discussing the efficiency  
Of chemicals that deal death to moss.  
Masks. I have one too, sitting at my desk  
In the smoke-filled office, pretending to estimate  
The quantities of asbestos and plasterboard  
For your cheap ugly factories  
That gobble up the green land  
Where children laughed and played,  
Trying to find words that can tell  
Something about tears I dare not show,  
Knowing that there has to be another way  
Yet helpless to know how or what,  
Whilst you worry about your profit and productivity  
And I about not dying.

### THE TREE

Always, when I looked at a tree  
There was an I who saw and the tree which was seen.  
As a child, the tree was for climbing, to swing from,  
A place to shoot crows or pick peaches.  
God was in Heaven  
Or He didn't exist at all  
And yet when I cried from my very depths  
He was always there to hear and answer me.  
In spring sometimes there was an effervescence  
Flowers bursting from the tree like champagne bubbles from my heart.  
The urge to be and the desperate need for light  
After all the barren cold of winter's gloom.  
And now sometimes the tree, the ground, the brick walls and tarmac streets  
And I  
Are one single coagulation of fluid stardust

Moving through these momentary forms in a dance of time  
 To be unravelled and re-formed  
 In the relentless onward thrust  
 Of matter's search for a being that can know itself  
 In every tiny atom, all at once,  
 For no particular reason than the bliss of being.

VIKAS

### I AM AN ACTIVE, LIVING DYNAMO

I am an Active, Living Dynamo  
 If you truly make One step towards me,  
 I will leap Nine steps to grab you,  
 Stir you up,  
 Churn you thoroughly,  
 Spin you around,  
 Swirl you upside down,  
 Draw you to yourself,  
 Strip you from all past,  
 And leave you NAKED.

CELESTINE

### THOUSANDS OF KINGDOMS

Thousands of kingdoms  
 Within my body,  
 Thousands of ages  
 Within my living cells —  
 Am I a tiny bubble  
 Captured in a TAMIL casket?

MEENAKSHI

**RETURN**

Perfection of stone is not for us,  
 nor the parabolic sigh  
 of swallows.  
 We are smudgier, awkward-limbed,  
 stumbling homewards  
 through the long, long grass.

**HINGE**

The green smiling trap of the known.  
 At midday it casts no shadow.  
 But at night . . .  
 . . . the hinge lies broken:  
 Eternity pours through.

**BEYOND**

To step beyond  
 is to leave all behind:  
 lovers, friends,  
 the understanding of a world  
 which, after all, offers its rewards.  
 This is a different path.  
 Quickly traversing the public square  
 it plunges into anonymity,  
 the trackless approach  
 to the lost kingdom of the Self.  
 Who Cares?

Perhaps, after all, they're the wise ones,  
 perfectly-shaped to surf  
 the random waves,  
 knowing nothing so well as the inside of their bowl,  
 or the quick touch on a bullock's flank.  
 As for those who, somehow, believe that,  
 pixel by pixel,  
 a new world is arriving  
 there's the long, slow search of the horizon  
 as the wind swings round to winter.

**IT'S THE BODY, STUPID**

It's the body, stupid,  
that keeps stumbling against us.  
All that heavy blood  
hammering at the heart,  
numbing nerves,  
flooding out the distant cry of morning.  
No wonder the artists air-brushed it  
or took it for the all-in-all.  
Yet what if blood, bone,  
aren't brutish anchors  
but doorways to a distant dance?  
The one that trembles atoms into flesh  
and fronts the great, grey surge of night.

ALAN HERBERT

*(Fifty Poems from Auroville, edited by Alan Vickers, Auroville, 2018)*



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