

Excerpts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother published in AIM booklets are the editor's selection intended to give the reader some basic idea on the subject. These are by no means exhaustive. These compilations, we hope, will inspire the reader to study the complete works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Titles and subtitles to the excerpts are given by the editor.

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“Read Sri Aurobindo”

Words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

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Sri Aurobindo: The Precursor of the Future

Sri Aurobindo has come on earth not to bring a teaching or a creed in competition with previous creeds or teachings, but to show the way to overpass the past and to open concretely the route towards an imminent and inevitable future.

*

Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past nor to history.

Sri Aurobindo is the Future advancing towards its realisation.

*

[Your] essential mistake was to have considered Sri Aurobindo's teaching as one among the spiritual teachings—and the work done here now as one among the many aspects of the Divine works. . . .

You must understand that what Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history, is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a *decisive action* direct from the Supreme.

And I am just trying to fulfil that action.

*

. . . Sri Aurobindo gives [in those pages] a very brief glimpse of *his own Work* at present on earth, his Work of divinising matter. . . .

*

Since the beginning of earth history, Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, one name or another.

*

Sri Aurobindo is an emanation of the Supreme who came on earth to announce the manifestation of a new race and a new world: the Supramental.

Let us prepare for it in all sincerity and eagerness.

*

Man is the creation of yesterday.

Sri Aurobindo came to announce the creation of tomorrow: the coming of the supramental being.

*

Sri Aurobindo came to tell the world of the beauty of the future that must be realised.

He came to give not a hope but a certitude of the splendour towards which the world moves. The world is not an unfortunate accident, it is a marvel which moves towards its expression.

The world needs the certitude of the beauty of the future. And Sri Aurobindo has given that assurance.

*

In the eternity of becoming, each Avatar is only the announcer, the forerunner of a more perfect realisation.

And yet men have always the tendency to deify the Avatar of the past in opposition to the Avatar of the future.

Now again Sri Aurobindo has come announcing to the world the realisation of tomorrow; and again his message meets with the same opposition as of all those who preceded him.

But tomorrow will prove the truth of what he revealed and his work will be done.

*

There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it....

Now, all depends on your will and your sincerity. If you have the will no more to belong to ordinary humanity, no more to be merely evolved animals; if your will is to become men of the new race realising Sri Aurobindo's supramental ideal, living a new and higher life upon a new earth, you will find here all the necessary help to achieve your purpose...

The Mother

“Read Sri Aurobindo”

... there are the very few who want to understand life, its purpose and its goal. For them, Sri Aurobindo's books are the best reading of all.

*

You came to earth to learn to know yourself.

Read Sri Aurobindo's books and look carefully within yourself as deeply as you can.

*

As for reading the works of Sri Aurobindo, it opens the door of the future to us.

*

The best thing we can do is to study all that he [Sri Aurobindo] has told us and endeavour to follow his example and prepare ourselves for the new manifestation.

This gives life its real sense and will help us to overcome all obstacles.

Let us live for the new creation and we shall grow stronger and stronger by remaining young and progressive.

*

If one reads Sri Aurobindo carefully one finds the answers to all that one wants to know.

*

By studying carefully what Sri Aurobindo has said on *all subjects* one can easily reach a complete knowledge of the things of this world.

*

Q: Mother, how can one become wise?

Read Sri Aurobindo.

*

Q: While waiting to become ready for a spiritual discipline, what should I do, apart from aspiring that the Mother may pull me out of the slumber and awaken my psychic consciousness?

To develop your intelligence read regularly and very attentively the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. To develop and master your vital, observe attentively your movements and reactions with the will to overcome desires, and aspire to find your psychic being and unite yourself with it. Physically, continue to do as you are doing, develop and control your body methodically, make yourself useful by working in... the place you work, and try to do it in as selfless a way as possible.

*

Q: To be able to offer my mind to Sri Aurobindo in all sincerity, is it not very necessary to develop a great power of concentration? Will you tell me by what method I could cultivate this precious faculty?

Fix a time when you can be quiet every day.

Take one of Sri Aurobindo books. Read a sentence or two. Then remain silent and concentrated to understand the deeper meaning. Try to concentrate deeply enough to obtain mental silence and begin again daily until you obtain a result.

Naturally you should not fall asleep.

The Mother

How to Read Sri Aurobindo's Books

To read my books is not difficult because they are written in the simplest language, almost the spoken language. To draw profit from them, it is enough to read with attention and concentration and an attitude of inner goodwill with the desire to receive and to live what is taught.

To read what Sri Aurobindo writes is more difficult because the expression is highly intellectual and the language is much more literary and philosophic. The brain needs a preparation to be able truly to understand and generally a preparation takes time, unless one is specially gifted with an innate intuitive faculty.

In any case, I advise always to read *a little* at a time, keeping the mind as tranquil as one can, without making an effort to understand, but keeping the head as silent as possible, and letting the *force contained in what one reads enter deep within*. This force received in the calm and the silence will do its work of light and, if needed, will create in the brain the necessary cells for the understanding. Thus, when one re-reads the same thing some months later, one perceives that the thought expressed has become much more clear and close, and even sometimes altogether familiar.

It is preferable to read regularly, a little every day, and at a fixed hour if possible; this facilitates the brain-receptivity.

*

In a general and almost absolute way, if you truly wish to profit from... Sri Aurobindo's writings, the best method is this: having gathered your consciousness and focused your attention on what you are reading, you must establish a

minimum of mental tranquillity—the best thing would be to obtain perfect silence—and achieve a state of immobility of the mind, immobility of the brain, I might say, so that the attention becomes as still and immobile as a mirror, like the surface of absolutely still water. Then what one has read passes through the surface and penetrates deep into the being where it is received with a minimum of distortion. Afterwards—sometimes long afterwards—it wells up again from the depths and manifests in the brain with its full power of comprehension, not as knowledge acquired from outside, but as a light one carried within.

In this way the faculty of understanding is at its highest, whereas if, while you read, the mind remains agitated and tries to understand at once what it is reading, you lose more than three-quarters of the force, the knowledge and the truth contained in the words. And if you are able to refrain from asking questions until this process of absorption and inner awakening is completed, well, then you will find that you have far fewer questions to ask because you will have a better understanding of what you have read.

*

... you are told something which you have never heard before; you listen, but it is incomprehensive, it does not penetrate into your head. But if you hear the same thing a second time, a little later, it makes sense. It is because the shock of the new idea has done a little work in the brain and prepared just what was necessary for understanding. And not only does it build itself up, but it perfects itself.... This work in the brain is done without the participation of your active consciousness. . . .

*

If you want to understand a book with a deep teaching in it, you must be able to read it in the mind's silence; you must wait and let the expression go deep inside you into the region where words are no more and from there come slowly back to your exterior consciousness and its surface understanding. But if you let the words jump at your external mind and try to adapt and adjust the two, you will have entirely missed their real sense and power. There can be no perfect understanding unless you are in union with the unexpressed mind that is behind the centre of expression.

... individual minds [are] worlds that are distinct and separate from one another; each is shut up in itself and has almost no direct point of contact with any other. But that is in the region of the inferior mind; there your own formation close you in; ... you can understand only yourself and your own reflection in things. But here in this higher region of the unexpressed mind and its purer altitudes you are free; when you enter there, you go out of yourself and penetrate into a universal mental plane. . .

*

It is not by books that Sri Aurobindo ought to be studied but by subjects — what he has said on the Divine, on Unity, on religion, on evolution, on education, on self-perfection, on supermind, etc., etc.

*

If you want to know what Sri Aurobindo has said on a given subject, you must at least read all that he has written on that subject. You will then see that he has apparently said the most contradictory things. But when one has read

everything, and understood a little, one perceives that all the contradictions complement each other and are organised and unified into an integral synthesis.

*

... you must not jump to hasty conclusions. If we wait with patience, at the end of the chapter he [Sri Aurobindo] will tell us – and tell us on a basis of irrefutable argument – why he has come to the conclusion he arrives at.

*

... all language is a language of ignorance. Our entire way of expressing ourselves, everything we say and the way in which we say it, is necessarily ignorance. And that is why it is so difficult to express something which is concretely true; this would require explanations which would themselves be full of falsehood, of course, or extremely long. This is why Sri Aurobindo's sentences are sometimes very long, precisely because he strives to escape from this ignorant language.

*

Programme for a study group:

1. Prayer (Sri Aurobindo, Mother — grant us your help in our endeavour to understand your teaching.)
2. *Reading of Sri Aurobindo's book.*
3. A moment of silence.
4. One question can be put by whoever wants to put a question on *what has been read*.
5. Answer to the question.
6. *No general discussion.*

*

Presenting Sri Aurobindo's Works to the Students:

... The important thing is that Sri Aurobindo's writings should not be chewed and presented to the students as a semi-digested food. The teacher may give all the elements of appreciation but students should have the direct contact, the joy of illumination. The teacher should be careful not to interpose himself as a screen between the mind of the student and the great consciousness of Sri Aurobindo.

*

Till the birth of Sri Aurobindo, religions and spiritualities were always centred on past figures, and they were showing as the goal the negation of life upon earth. So, you had a choice between two alternatives: either

— a life *in* this world with its round of petty pleasures and pains, joys and sufferings, threatened by hell if you were not behaving properly, or

— an escape *into* another world, heaven, nirvana, moksha....

Between these two there is nothing much to choose, they are equally bad.

Sri Aurobindo has told us that this was a fundamental mistake which accounts for the weakness and degradation of India. Buddhism, Jainism, Illusionism were sufficient to sap all energy out of the country....

Sri Aurobindo has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but in remaining *in* it, to *transform it, divinise it*, so that the Divine can manifest **HERE, in this PHYSICAL WORLD.**

You should say all this at the first sitting. You should be square and frank...like that! (*With her hands Mother makes a*

big square sign on the table.)

Then, when this is told, strongly, squarely, and there is no doubt about it and then only you can go on and amuse them [students] with the history...

*

Q: Yesterday You said in our The Synthesis of Yoga class that it is useless and even stupid to comment on Sri Aurobindo's writings. Sweet Mother, I have been committing this stupidity in my classes... May I ... stop giving them?

Many lazy-minded people are very happy to be given explanations about Sri Aurobindo's books, because they have the feeling that they understand better. That is why I have not interfered. Indeed, it is better for people to hear readings and take interest in them than to have no contact at all with Sri Aurobindo's writings.

So you should continue with the class; but in making comments, you must understand that they cannot avoid being inadequate, and the original text far surpasses anything you can say about it.

The Mother

People often catch hold of something written by me or said by the Mother, give it an interpretation quite other than or far beyond its true meaning and deduce from it a suddenly extreme and logical conclusion which is quite contrary to our knowledge and experience. It is natural, I suppose, and part of the game of the hostile forces; it is so much easier to come to vehement logical conclusions than to look at the Truth which is many-sided and whole.

Sri Aurobindo

How to Get Answers From Sri Aurobindo's Books

Q: Once or twice, as a game, you took one of your books or Sri Aurobindo's and opened a page at random, and read out a sentence. Can these sentences give one a sign or an indication? What should we do to get a true answer?

Everybody can do it. It is done in this way: you concentrate. Now, it depends on what you want. If you have an inner problem and want the solution, you concentrate on this problem; if you want to know the condition you are in, which you are not aware of—if you want to get some light on the state you are in, you just come forward with simplicity and ask for the light. Or else, quite simply, if you are curious to know what the invisible knowledge has to tell you, you remain silent and still for a moment and then open the book. I always used to recommend taking a paper-knife, because it is thinner; while you are concentrated you insert it in the book and with the tip indicate something. Then, if you know how to concentrate, that is to say, if you really do it with an aspiration to have an answer, it always comes.

For, in books of this kind (*Mother shows "The Synthesis of Yoga"*), books of revelation, there is always an accumulation of forces—at least of higher mental forces, and most often of spiritual forces of the highest knowledge. Every book, on account of the words it contains, is like a small accumulator of these forces. People don't know this, for they don't know how to make use of it, but it is so. In the same way, in every picture, photograph, there is an accumulation, a small accumulation representative of the force

of the person whose picture it is, of his nature and, if he has powers, of his powers. Now, you, when you are sincere and have an aspiration, you emanate a certain vibration, the vibration of your aspiration which goes and meets the corresponding force in the book, and it is a higher consciousness which gives you the answer.

Everything is contained potentially. Each element of a whole potentially contains what is in the whole. It is a little difficult to explain, but you will understand with an example: when people want to practise magic, if they have a bit of nail or hair, it is enough for them, because within this, potentially, there is all that is in the being itself. And in a book there is potentially—not expressed, not manifest—the knowledge which is in the person who wrote the book. Thus, Sri Aurobindo represented a totality of comprehension and knowledge and power; and every one of his books is at once a symbol and a representation. Every one of his books contains symbolically, potentially, what is in him.

Therefore, if you concentrate on the book, you can, through the book, go back to the source. And even, by passing through the book, you will be able to receive much more than what is just in the book.

There is always a way of reading and understanding what one reads, which gives an answer to what you want. It is not just a chance or an amusement, nor is it a kind of diversion. You may do it just “like that”, and then nothing at all happens to you, you have no reply and it is not interesting. But if you do it seriously, if seriously your aspiration tries to concentrate on this instrument—it is like a battery, isn’t it, which contains energies—if it tries to come into contact with the energy which is there and insists on having the answer to what it wants to know, well, natu-

rally, the energy which is there—the union of the two forces, the force given out by you and that accumulated in the book—will guide your hand and your paper-knife or whatever you have; it will guide you exactly to the thing that expresses what you ought to know.... Obviously, if one does it without sincerity or conviction, nothing at all happens. If it is done sincerely, one gets an answer.

Certain books are like this, more powerfully charged than others; there are others where the result is less clear. But generally, books containing aphorisms and short sentences—not very long philosophical explanations, but rather things in a condensed and precise form—it is with these that one succeeds best.

Naturally, the value of the answer depends on the value of the spiritual force contained in the book. If you take a novel, it will tell you nothing at all but stupidities. But if you take a book containing a condensation of forces—of knowledge or spiritual force or teaching power—you will receive your answer.

The Mother

You say that you have read all our books, but still you remain ignorant and it has not brought any change in your life and so it is useless to read. But after reading you know what is the right thing and what is not. Only your inner connection has not yet become so strong that it may act upon your life. One day it will become strong enough to act upon you more effectively. But if you had not read at all you would not have known what should be done and what should not be done and you would have said, "I didn't know", and the condition would have been worse.

The Mother

Intellectual Preparation in Yoga

It is not enough to devote ourselves by the reading of Scriptures or by the stress of philosophic reasoning to an intellectual understanding of the Divine; for at the end of our long mental labour we might know all that has been said of the Eternal, possess all that can be thought about the Infinite and yet we might not know him at all. This intellectual preparation can indeed be the first stage in a powerful Yoga, but it is not indispensable: it is not a step which all need or can be called upon to take. Yoga would be impossible, except for a very few, if the intellectual figure of knowledge arrived at by the speculative or meditative Reason were its indispensable condition or a binding preliminary. All that the Light from above asks of us that it may begin its work is a call from the soul and a sufficient point of support in the mind. This support can be reached through an insistent idea of the Divine in the thought, a corresponding will in the dynamic parts, an aspiration, a faith, a need in the heart. Any one of these may lead or predominate, if all cannot move in unison or in an equal rhythm. The idea may be and must in the beginning be inadequate; the aspiration may be narrow and imperfect, the faith poorly illumined or even, as not surely founded on the rock of knowledge, fluctuating, uncertain, easily diminished; often even it may be extinguished and need to be lit again with difficulty like a torch in a windy pass. But if once there is a resolute self-consecration from deep within, if there is an awakening to the soul's call, these inadequate things can be a sufficient instrument for the divine purpose.

*

It is not by the intellect that one can progress in the yoga but by psychic and spiritual receptivity—as for knowledge and true understanding, it grows in sadhana by the growth of the intuition, not of the physical intellect.

*

A well-trained intellect is a good preparation of the mind for greater knowledge, but it cannot itself give the yogic knowledge or know the Divine—it can only have ideas about the Divine, but having ideas is not knowledge. In the course of the sadhana intellect has to be transformed into the higher mind which is itself a passage towards the true knowledge.

*

Men are supposed to follow their intellect, to have and assert their own ideas right or wrong without any control; the intellect, it is said, is man's highest instrument and he must think and act according to its ideas. But this is not true; the intellect needs an inner light to guide, check and control it quite as much as the vital. There is something above the intellect which one has to discover and the intellect should be only an intermediary for the action of that source of true Knowledge.

*

The turmoil of mental (intellectual) activity has also to be silenced like the vital activity of desire in order that the calm and peace may be complete. Knowledge has to come but from above.

Sri Aurobindo

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.

*

When I speak of the psychic or the spiritual, I mean things that are very deep and real behind the flat surface of the words and intimately connected even in their difference. Intellectual definitions and distinctions are too external and rigid to seize the true truth of things.

*

Q: Sweet Mother, often when I read Sri Aurobindo's works or listen to his words, I am wonder-struck: how can this eternal truth, this beauty of expression escape people! It is really strange that he is not yet recognised, at least as a supreme creator, a pure artist, a poet par excellence! So I tell myself that my judgments, my appreciations are influenced by my devotion for the Master—and not everyone is devoted. I do not think this is true. But then, why are men's hearts not yet enchanted by His Words?

Who can understand Sri Aurobindo? He is as vast as the universe and his teaching is limitless...

The only way to come a little close to him is to love him sincerely and give oneself unreservedly to his work. In that way, each one does his best and contributes as much as he can to the transformation of the world which Sri Aurobindo has predicted.

*

I have noticed ... that if I ... read to you something with philosophical terms or to speak to you from a slightly philosophical point of view, you cannot follow. And that is simply because you have not done any philosophical gymnastics. It is not that you are not intelligent, it is not that you don't have the capacity to understand: it is because you haven't done the proper gymnastics. I could tell you the same thing in another way: you have not learnt the language. But the same words are used, only with a slightly different relation between them, with different turns of phrase, with a different mental attitude to things. Well, this difference of attitude you cannot have unless you have done the corresponding gymnastics. And it is very easy for you to understand this example, for you all know very well that you could never do your athletic exercises if you were not trained. Even if you have special abilities, even if you are gifted, if you do not practise and train yourself, you cannot do them.

*

Q: My beloved Mother, I want to follow a systematic course of metaphysics and ethics.

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.

The Mother

"But thought nor word can seize eternal Truth"

Sri Aurobindo

Reading of Books as Help in Sadhana

Reading good books can be of help in the early mental stage—they prepare the mind, put it in the right atmosphere, can even, if one is very sensitive, bring some glimpses of realisation on the mental plane. Afterwards the utility diminishes—you have to find every knowledge and experience in yourself.

*

It depends on the nature of the book. Philosophy makes the mind subtle in certain directions—or ought to do so. The only harm it can do is if the mind begins clinging to ideas instead of going forward to direct experience.

*

Intelligence does not depend on the amount one has read, it is a quality of the mind. Study only gives it material for its work as life also does.

*

It is quite natural to want to meditate while reading yogic literature—that is not the laziness. The laziness of the mind consists in not meditating, when the consciousness wants to do so.

*

All should be done quietly from within—working, speaking, reading, writing as part of the real consciousness—not with the dispersed and unquiet movement of the ordinary consciousness.

*

When the passion for reading or study seizes hold of the mind, it is like that; one wants to spend all the time doing it. It is a force that wants to satisfy itself—like other forces—and takes hold of the consciousness for its purpose. One has to utilise these forces without letting them take hold; for this there must be the central being always in control of the forces of Nature that come to it, deciding for itself the choice of what it shall accept, how use, how arrange their action. Otherwise each Force catches hold of some part of the personality (the student, the social man, the erotic man, the fighter) and uses and drives the being instead of being controlled and used by it.

*

It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one state or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the external consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature.

*

To read: what will help the yoga or what will be useful for the work or what will develop the capacities for the divine purpose.

Not to read: worthless stuff or for mere entertainment or for a dilettante intellectual curiosity which is of the nature of a mental dram-drinking.

*

You can remember at the beginning and offer your reading to the Divine and at the end again.

Sri Aurobindo

Q: Do You think that studying helps me in my sadhana?

It is a good discipline both for the mind and the vital.

*

Studies strengthen the mind and turn its concentration away from the impulses and desires of the vital. Concentrating on study is one of the most powerful ways of controlling the mind and the vital; that is why it is so important to study.

The Mother

A concentration which culminates in a living realisation and the constant sense of the presence of the One in ourselves and in all of which we are aware, is what we mean in Yoga by knowledge and the effort after knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo

Shastra and Beyond the Shastra

The virtue of the Shastra is that it sets up a standard outside ourselves, different from our personal desires, reasonings, passions and prejudices, outside our selfishness and self-will, by living up to which in the right spirit we can not only acquire self-control but by reducing even the sattwic *ahañkāra* to a minimum prepare ourselves for liberation. In the old days the Shastra was the Vedic Dharma based upon a profound knowledge of man's psychology and the laws of the world, revealing man to himself and showing him how to live according to his nature; afterwards it was the law of the Smritis which tried to do the same thing more roughly by classifying men according to the general classes of which the Vedas speak, the *cāturvarṇya*; today it is little more than blind mechanical custom and habitual social observance, a thing not sattwic but tamasic, not a preparatory discipline for liberation, but a mere bondage.

Even the highest Shastra can be misused for the purposes of egoism, the egoism of virtue and the egoism of prejudice and personal opinion. At its best it is a great means towards the preparation of liberation. It is *śabda-brahma*. But we must not be satisfied with mere preparation, we must, as soon as our eyes are opened, hasten on to actual freedom. The liberated soul and the sadhak of liberation who has surrendered even his actions to God, gets beyond the highest Shastra, *śabdabrahmātivartate*.

Sri Aurobindo

Not to be the Sadhak of Books but of the Infinite

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

Sri Aurobindo

Teachings of Sri Aurobindo

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo* starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all.

Sri Aurobindo's teaching states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.

But while the former steps in evolution were taken by

* In this statement Sri Aurobindo speaks of himself in the third person. -Ed.

Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. It is not, however, by the mental will in man that this can be wholly done, for the mind goes only to a certain point and after that can only move in a circle. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle. This method is to be found through the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.

This, however, cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the supramental descent is possible. Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake—for it is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now and that pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater

beauty, harmony, power and knowledge. The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward life by an inner light and force. In doing so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements but something of the Reality behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature. There can follow afterwards an opening upward and descent of a higher principle of the Being. But even then it is not at once the full supramental Light and Force. For there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supramental Truth-Consciousness. These intervening ranges have to be opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body. Only afterwards can the full power of the Truth-Consciousness work in the nature. The process of this self-discipline or Sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate release and perfection more possible.

There are many things belonging to older systems that are necessary on the way—an opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the Infinite, an emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness, mastery over the desires and passions; an outward asceticism is not essential, but the conquest of desire and attachment and a control over the body and its needs, greeds and instincts are indispensable. There is a combination of the principles of the old systems, the way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between Reality and

the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and the way of works turning the will away from motives of self-interest to the Truth and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. For the whole being has to be trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that greater Light and Force to work in the nature. . . .

This is Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice. It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion—for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, —a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

Sri Aurobindo

**Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is not a Retreading of Old Walks,
but a Step Forward in Evolution:**

My truth is one that rejects ignorance and falsehood and moves to the knowledge, rejects darkness and moves to the light, rejects egoism and moves to the Divine Self, rejects imperfections and moves to perfection. My truth is not only the truth of Bhakti or of psychic development but also of knowledge, purity, divine strength and calm and of the raising of all these things from their mental, emotional and vital forms to their supramental reality.

*

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the

Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.

*

... the manifestation of God in matter... [is] the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.

*

To become complete in being, in consciousness of being, in force of being, in delight of being and to live in this integrated completeness is the divine living.

*

[Our] aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter. . . .

The sadhana of this yoga does not proceed through any set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, Mantras or others, but by aspiration, by a self-concentration inwards or upwards, by self-opening to an Influence, to the Divine Power above us and its workings, to the Divine Presence in the heart and by the rejection of all that is foreign to these things. It is only by faith, aspiration and surrender that this self-opening can come.

Sri Aurobindo

Practise What You Read

... what used to happen before there were printing presses and books, . . . only the Guru or the Initiate had the knowledge and gave it only to those he considered worthy of having it. And for him, usually, "to be worthy of having it" meant *putting into practice* what one had learnt. He gave you a truth and expected you to practise it. And when you had put it into practice, he consented to give you another.

Now things happen quite differently. Everybody and anybody can have a book, read it right through and he is quite free to practise it or not as he pleases. This is all very well, but it creates a certain confusion in many minds, and people who have read many books think that it is enough and that all sorts of miraculous things must happen to them because they have read books, and that they don't need to take the trouble of practising. So they become impatient and say, "How is it that although I have read all this I am still just the same person, have the same difficulties, haven't achieved any realisation?" I very often hear remarks of this kind.

They forget only one thing, that they have obtained the knowledge—intellectual, mental knowledge—before having deserved it, that is, before having put into practice what they have read, and that, naturally, there is discrepancy between their state of consciousness and the ideas, the knowledge they can speak about at length but which they haven't practised. . . .

So, this is to tell you that you must not be impatient, that you must understand that in order to really possess knowledge, whatever it may be, you must put it into

practice, that is, master your nature so as to be able to express this knowledge in action.

*

It is no use reading books of guidance if one is not determined to *live* what they teach.

*

A little sincere and regular practice is worth more than a lot of short-lived resolutions.

*

It is up to you to make true in practice the ideal that your mind sets before you.

*

You seem to be very conscious already of what ought and ought not to be done, but with you the difficulty begins with putting it into practice. You should ask, not for more knowledge, but for the strength and courage to apply sincerely and scrupulously the little you already know.

*

It is not enough to know, you must *practise*.

It is not enough to pretend, you must *be*.

*

On the path of Truth, in order to know more you must put into practice what you already know.

A little bit of sincere practice is worth much more than a lot of written or spoken words.

*

A drop of practice is better than an ocean of theories, advices and good resolutions.

*

To listen is good, but not sufficient—you must understand. To understand is better, but still not sufficient—you must act.

*

People who do not live what they think are useless.

*

It is good to read a Divine Teaching.
It is better to learn it.
The best is to live it.

*

All theories, all teachings are, in the last analysis, nothing but ways of seeing and speaking. Even the highest revelations are worth no more than the power of realisation that comes with them.

*

[The Mother read in one of her Friday class a few verses of the Dhammapada and commented as under:]

The opening text [of *The Thousands*] says that a single word that gives you peace is worth more than thousands of words that have no meaning—this anybody can understand—but it is also said that the word that gives you peace is worth more than thousands of words that can satisfy the mental activity but have no psychological effect on your being.

Indeed, when you have found something which has the power to help you in gaining a victory over your unconsciousness and inertia, you must, till you reach the final result, exhaust all the effects produced by that word or phrase before you look for others.

It is more important to pursue to its end the practice of the effect produced by an idea that one has met somehow, than to try to accumulate in the head a large number of ideas. Ideas may all be very useful in their own time, if they are allowed in at the opportune moment, particularly if you carry to the extreme limit the result of one of those dynamic ideas that are capable of making you win an inner victory. That is to say, one should have for one's chief, if not only aim the practice of what one knows rather than the accumulation in oneself of a knowledge which remains purely theoretical.

So one could sum up: put into practice integrally what you know, only then can you usefully increase your theoretical knowledge.

The Mother

Shun the barren snare of an empty metaphysics and the dry dust of an unfertile intellectuality. Only that knowledge is worth having which can be made use of for a living delight and put out into temperament, action, creation and being.

*

Become & live the knowledge thou hast; then is thy knowledge the living God within thee.

Sri Aurobindo

* TURN TOWARDS THE ETERNAL * TURN TOWARDS THE ETERNAL *

Turn Towards the Eternal

The lotus of the eternal knowledge and the eternal perfection is a bud closed and folded up within us. It opens swiftly or gradually, petal by petal, through successive realisations, once the mind of man begins to turn towards the Eternal, once his heart, no longer compressed and confined by attachment to finite appearances, becomes enamoured, in whatever degree, of the Infinite. All life, all thought, all energising of the faculties, all experiences passive or active, become thenceforward so many shocks which disintegrate the teguments of the soul and remove the obstacles to the inevitable efflorescence. He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite. He has received the divine touch without which there is no awakening, no opening of the spirit; but once it is received, attainment is sure, whether conquered swiftly in the course of one human life or pursued patiently through many stadia of the cycle of existence in the manifested universe. . . .

We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature. All teaching is a revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self-attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process.

Sri Aurobindo

* TURN TOWARDS THE ETERNAL * TURN TOWARDS THE ETERNAL *

APPENDIX

How to Read Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

(By Nolini Kanta Gupta)

Why do we read the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? And if we read them, how to read them?

Do we read for the sake of study? to know things? to acquire knowledge? That is a secondary aspect, a profit gained by the way. The real purpose of coming in contact with the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is to become conscious, to acquire consciousness, to be more and more conscious, increase more and more the consciousness. To understand, that is to say, to seize by the mind, to grasp intellectually the writing of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is rather difficult. The easier, the more right way would be to enter into the atmosphere of the world that they have created with their words, to feel the vibration that the words emanate. For the words that they have uttered are not mere words taken or found in the dictionaries, they are not mere sounds, dead syllables, they are living entities, symbols of consciousness, the consciousness of which I have just spoken. These symbols, being symbols of consciousness are luminous, they shed light all along, they are full of power and extend power all along, they have life and they are full of delight. It is this inner world that is behind the outer world of words that one has to be in touch with, be aware of, in the first instance, before one can have a mental understanding; in other words you must cultivate the right attitude, a turn of your consciousness in tune with the consciousness that has worked out the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. You have to take a plunge, as it

were, dip into the waters, and be soaked in the caress of that element, to come in the living touch of the substance of words, go behind the meaning, if necessary, avoiding it even. You must contact the living sap, the *rasa*, that has poured itself out in the creation. If you have tasted of that, then—it has its own light—that will suffuse you automatically with its radiance; the delight of bathing in the living spring will formulate itself in rhythms of knowledge and true understanding.

At least such should be the basis of approach to the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. You may have possessed a rich intellectual apparatus, you may have all the information that sciences and philosophies have gathered, you may have perused the whole story of the evolution of human knowledge up to the present time, all these are lesser lights, they do not illuminate the light before which you stand. That light is shown and recognised by its own reflection or emanation in you, the little light that is in you, your soul.

Indeed, there have been instances where great intellectuals, famed savants found themselves bewildered before the simplest magic phrases of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. On the other hand, simpler minds with no burden of learning, nor pride of pedantry, with their pure streak of light in the depth of their consciousness were able to seize and unveil the secret sense.

Your mental understanding, your intellectual apprehension may or will add to the joy of your discovery; one that is perhaps at the end or subsequently, when your brain, your physical reason has been washed by the flow of the inner light, when it has been made pure and plastic and docile.

In another way, to understand the Truth—the Truth that the words of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo express—you must start by living it, approaching it not merely through your mind, in fact not even through your heart, but possessing it in the very body. The Mother says, real understanding comes by the body-understanding. Indeed, the true aim of knowledge is not merely to know but to be.

*

To Read Sri Aurobindo

(By Nolini Kanta Gupta)

I learned that you want to know something about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from me. But then there are three lines of approach: you may want to know *about* them, know *of* them* or know them. Of course the last is the best. Indeed if you want to know truly something you have to become it. Becoming gives the real knowledge. But becoming Sri Aurobindo and the Mother means what? Becoming a portion of them, a part and parcel of their consciousness—that is what we are here for. And if you can do that, you know enough....

Once I told you, I think, how to study or approach Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in order to read them or understand their writings. There are two things: studying and reading; I made a distinction between the two. To study Sri Aurobindo is—I won't say fruitless, that is too strong a

* "About" means what a man does, what his profession is, his occupation—*kimāisita vrajeta kim?* —and "of" means his personality, his character, nature.

word, but it can only be an aid or a supplementary way. Study means: you take the text, you understand mentally each word and phrase; if you don't understand, you take a dictionary and try to catch the external meaning expressed by the words. That may be necessary but it is not the way to approach their works.

Simply to read them in the right way is sufficient. Read, it does not matter what you understand and what you do not, simply read and wait in an expectant silence. In studying you approach them with your external mind, your external intelligence. But what is there in the text is beyond your mind, beyond your intelligence. And to understand mentally means you drive your intellect forward into the thing. It is an effort and takes you only to the outside of the thing. It is an exercise of your brain, developed in that way, but it doesn't take you very far. Instead of that, suppose you could keep quiet, silence your mind, and only read, without unduly trying to understand, and wait for what is there in the text to enter into you. Instead of your intelligence driving forward, pushing forward and trying to catch the thing, let the thing come into you; for what is there in their writings is not words and phrases, dead material, it is something very living, something conscious, that they have expressed in the words, phrases and the sound and rhythm. And I may tell you that each sentence anywhere, not to speak of *Savitri*, is a living being with whom you have to make acquaintance—not that you understand or are able to explain, but it is a living being, an entity, a friend, even a Lover whom you have to know. And your attempt in that way will be rewarded. You will enjoy much more. You may ask: "Just because I open a book and read, how can what are in the lines come to me?" But I say they

are living entities— if you approach in the right spirit, they come into you. The consciousness, the being in each line comes to you. And you find how beautiful it is. This is an approach of love, not of the intellect to understand and explain. Take for example, the very first verse of *Savitri*:

“It was the hour before the Gods awake.”

It is a Mantra, a living person, how beautiful it is, you needn't understand much—and a whole world is there.

Or, take the opening sentence of *The Life Divine*—the rolling cadence of the vast ocean is there. It brings you a sense of vastness, a sense of Infinity and takes you there. And, as I said, it is a very living entity and personality.

Here is the whole passage:

“The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, —for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment, —is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, —God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.”

There is indeed a personality behind it and you have to make acquaintance with that personality. That is what I meant when I said: become it, by an approach through love,

an approach through your soul. Even in studies you shouldn't approach with the mere intellect, mere mental understanding; however fine an understanding or intellect you may have, it won't lead you very far. Only through your soul you can go far. Even intellectual things can be approached through your soul—because the soul is the very essence of all your faculties and being. The soul is not mere consciousness, mere being, it gathers in all the elements of your personality. The seeds of your mind, your vital, even of the physical personality, the true physical personality, are there in your soul, and you can establish a true relation with things and persons through that part of your being—your soul. And remember the soul is not very far from you because you are that—rather your mind, your vital, your physical are away from you; they are not your true personality. It is your soul that is nearest to you.

In this connection you may remember what the Mother has said more than once: what is one here for? What are the children here for? And what is she giving here in the school, in the playground, in all the activities? It is not simple efficiency in the outer activities that is given here, or meant to be given here. For such things one can get outside in a more successful way—external efficiency of your intellect, of your mind, of your vital capacity and your physical strength—the Russian or the German type. Our records don't match theirs, do they? But we don't aspire for those records. For, as the Mother has said: "I am giving here something which you won't get any where else in the world—nowhere except here." In your external expression you may cut a very poor figure: low marks—but that is not the sign of the Truth that we acquire here. You acquire it even without your knowing it. When you are in the

swimming pool you are soaked all through, aren't you? You can't help it; so here also; even without your knowing it you are soaked with the inner consciousness of your soul. It is a very precious thing—I should say, the only precious thing in the world. And through that, if you study, you learn—if you approach that way, you will get another taste, another interest in things.

When I was reading with Sri Aurobindo, he didn't lay much stress upon the grammar or the language—just the most elementary grammar that was necessary. He used to put me in contact with the “life, the living personality of the poet—what he was, what he represented in his consciousness. That was the central theme, because a truly great poet means a status of consciousness; in order to understand his consciousness you must become identified with his being.

Amrita also used to say the same thing, because he was learning the Gita from Sri Aurobindo. He could feel the spirit of Krishna and the spirit of Arjuna throughout—their relations and the atmosphere they created. It is not the mere lesson, the teaching, that is important—that is secondary. The person is the primary thing. And the person in the book or outside, you can approach only through your soul, through love. The soul alone can love.

I think I told you that once somebody asked me: “You speak of the soul but where is it?”

I said: “It is very near you; still you don't believe. If you see into yourself quietly, you will find that there are very many good things in you, not only bad things—bits perhaps, shades or shadows perhaps, but you know this is a good thought in you, this is a noble impulse, a sweet feeling. Each one has all these things, you have only to

recognise them. All this is the expression of the soul in you. The beautiful, the luminous, the noble things that appear to you, in your consciousness, from time to time, all come from your soul." Even the greatest villain has such moments. You remember Lady Macbeth—known as the cruellest woman; well, she said about Duncan, "I would have killed him myself but he looked like my father*" — well, that is the feeling even she had. So let us not despair, even the weakest among us should not despair. First of all, each one has a soul, and secondly, we have the luminously strong support of the Mother. It is the nature of the Divine that even if you don't think of Him He thinks of you. It is true, very true; because you are part of the Divine. Only you have to concentrate consciously on that part, that portion; then gradually it will increase.

* * *

*Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene 2.

Lady Macbeth: ... Had he not resembled

My father as he slept, I had done't.

Now, what the intellect has understood let the whole being realise. Mental knowledge must be replaced by the flaming power of progress.

The Mother

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