

The Call Beyond





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Isha: the Favourite Upanishad of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy is deeply rooted in Vedanta. However, one of the hallmarks of his philosophy is its strongly life-affirming character. The assertion that the Divine, the Absolute Reality, has undergone a self-limitation in the course of manifesting as the material universe is one of the basic tenets of Vedanta. However, this tenet can lead to two contrasting corollaries. *One* of these is that since the material universe is merely a fragile and fleeting phenomenon, it is not worthy of interest. While the ignorant masses engage in this play of the Divine with gusto and waste their precious lives, the wise one rejects this superficial world in order to discover the imperishable and constant Reality behind the appearances. This is how Vedanta can acquire a life-negating tilt. However, the basic philosophy remaining the same, Vedanta can be given *another* tilt. Since the world is a manifestation of the Divine, it is not an illusion. If the Divine is real, Its manifestation cannot be unreal. Therefore, the world should not be rejected but transformed, so that it befits the One that it manifests. This is a life-affirming tilt, the interpretation to which Sri Aurobindo has lent powerful support. Upanishads are one of the pillars of Vedanta, and it is not surprising that one of the favourite Upanishads of Sri Aurobindo was the *Isha Upanishad*, which has a strong life-embracing character. In the opening verse, the *Isha Upanishad* states the profound Truth of the all-pervasive presence of the Divine in the universe in the first line, and in the second jumps to the sage advice that worldly life should be renounced and enjoyed. To 'renounce and enjoy' seems to carry an internal contradiction, but, in fact, worldly life can be enjoyed only if the person has achieved inner renunciation. Finally comes at the end of the second line, a rather mundane advice that we should not lust after any man's possession. If a person has achieved inner renunciation, he will naturally not desire something that does not belong to him. Thus, the very first verse sets the tone – first by reminding us that the material universe has the all-pervasive



presence of the Divine, and therefore should not be rejected; and then by telling us how we may enjoy worldly life. In verse 9, we find another startling statement: In darkness are the ignorant; in still greater darkness are those who follow *only* Knowledge. The ordinary man rooted in the mental consciousness is in darkness because he is unaware of the deeper Reality within, behind and beyond what is visible to him. But how is a person who has the Knowledge of the Absolute Reality in still greater darkness? That happens if he follows *only* Knowledge. This person is complacent because he lives in the smug satisfaction of knowing what very few in the world know. But by treating only the Absolute Reality as real, and refusing to see the Divine in the manifest universe, he is neglecting one aspect of the very Reality that he considers real. However, the ascetic who has *only* such one-sided Knowledge of the Absolute Reality erroneously believes that he knows something beyond which there is nothing more to be known. He is not only ignorant; he does not even know that he is ignorant. Hence there is no hope that his ignorance will ever be lifted. Therefore, the darkness in which he lives is beyond redemption. On the other hand, the ordinary ignorant person might one day discover the deeper truths of existence. Hence there is hope that one day his ignorance will be lifted. Therefore, his darkness is less than that of the one who has the Knowledge. Finally, towards the end of the *Isha Upanishad*, verse 17 talks in one line about the *Vayu* (Breath) being immortal, and the body ending in ashes, that is, being mortal. This tells us that although matter is mortal, the Spirit that animates it is immortal. The verse makes us aware of the invisible imperishable Reality being the core of what is visible and perishable. Thus the manifest universe is inseparable from the Absolute Reality it manifests. The principle that the Upanishad thus follows is, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “the uncompromising reconciliation of uncompromising extremes”.

First published a blog on the ‘Speaking Tree’ website on 14 August 2012. The blog is available on: <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/isha-the-favourite-upanishad-of-sri-aurobindo>



Sri Aurobindo: A Bridge between the Past and the Future

Man is unique among animals in looking for a deeper meaning in life than just feeding and breeding. Although the views about what that meaning is have been many, they are all united in looking at happiness, crude or subtle, individual or collective, as either the goal of life or as a by-product. It is interesting that the deepest look at the deeper meaning of life was taken in India in the Vedic times, and after trying several alternatives, the world has once again turned to that ancient wisdom for bringing joy, peace and purpose to human existence. This time-honoured ancient wisdom, based on the spiritual worldview, looks at individual happiness as inseparable from collective happiness, and both in turn as dependent on living a life with a deep purpose, the purpose being spiritual growth.

The significance of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was a unique phenomenon. He spent fourteen years from childhood through youth in England, followed immediately by another fourteen years in India, both these periods spent on observing, studying, and critically evaluating two diverse cultures with his extremely sharp intellect, thereby achieving a synthesis of the East and the West. On top of that, he had phenomenal spiritual capacity, an evidence of which may be seen in his experience of the unmanifest Divine in the state of Samadhi, which was reached at age 35 within three days. Such a combination is unprecedented in human history, and is unlikely to be repeated in the near future. Therefore, through his major works written over a six year period from 1914-1920, he has given the world in the English language, in contemporary terms, ancient Indian wisdom in a form that is an unparalleled combination of synthesis, critical analysis, originality and spiritual insight. He was a seer and a poet rather than a philosopher, but to satisfy the rationalistic mind of today, he rationalized spiritual wisdom



in *The Life Divine* in a way that can at least challenge, if not entirely convince, the greatest intellectual genius. **He looked at the wisdom of the past in terms of the present, and gave a roadmap for the future, which would lead to nothing short of creating a radically different and better world.**

Sri Aurobindo's works are rooted in Vedanta. But Vedanta itself can be interpreted in so many ways. Unfortunately, the tilt that Vedanta has acquired in India over the last one thousand years is that the world is an illusion, and therefore an obstacle on the path of Realization. This idea, which dominates the Indian psyche even today leads to neglect and degeneration of material life, and restricts spirituality to a select few who renounce the world to lead an ascetic life. But this is not how it always was in India. In Vedic times, the ideal was a rich and vibrant worldly life, which was permeated by spirituality, and that ideal is also based on Vedanta. Sri Aurobindo has argued that since Vedanta considers the world to be a manifestation of the Divine, the material world is another form of the Divine. If the Divine is real, all its forms are real. The manifest form may be an imperfect, perishable and inconstant reality, but it is not unreal. The manifestation may not be eternal in form but it is eternal in its essence. **Therefore, the world and worldly life should not be rejected, but should be transformed so that they benefit the One that they manifest.** Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo are among the spiritual geniuses that this country has had the good fortune of having in the recent past, and they are all united in emphasizing a life-affirming brand of spirituality which seeks to divinize everyday life. In a nutshell, spirituality transforms everyday life by giving us a fundamental basis of oneness of all creation, which in turn leads to love and compassion. Love gives joy to the one who gives as well as to the one who receives it. Love is expressed by giving what we have to those who need it, which leads to caring and sharing. That is what makes for a better and happier world. Since true



love is based on the spiritual worldview, it makes the spiritual worldview more and more real to the person who lives a life full of love. The spiritual worldview becoming more and more real is called spiritual growth, or growth of consciousness, and that is the purpose of human life.

Sri Aurobindo went beyond the purpose of human life at the individual level. He visualized a large number of people making a conscious effort to grow in consciousness. This effort generates a feeling of oneness with one's fellow beings, and thereby changes human nature. When the number of such selfless persons will reach a critical mass, the world will become a better place. Further, he visualized this process in terms of evolution. Evolution from matter to life, and from life to mind, is the result of progressive unfolding of the Supreme Consciousness of the Divine which was hidden even in matter. Man is the latest product of the process, but there is no reason to believe that man with a mental consciousness is its final product. But man is unique in being capable of evolving during his lifetime. A large number of people making a conscious effort to evolve can give a push to the evolution of a principle higher than the mind. At that level of consciousness, which he has called the level of the supermind, life will be driven by love, not by the ego as it is in human beings living at the level of the mind. **That will be the ultimate solution to the problems of human existence because then the affairs of the world will be conducted from the plane of supramental consciousness.** His personal *sadhana* after 1926, and that of the Mother, was dedicated to bringing the supramental consciousness to earth. There is considerable evidence that the consciousness of the human race has risen perceptibly in the recent past, and its effects have started becoming visible. In spite of what we may feel superficially, statistics show that the access to education and healthcare, deaths due to war and famines, and several such indicators are today better than ever before; and moreover, the reaction to evil and injustice is today swift and



global. Thus there is ample reason to be confident that we are moving towards a new and better world.

In short, if life is considered a journey, life itself is the vehicle that we get for going towards the goal. The work that we do, and all the conditions and circumstances we get in life, are potentially the opportunities that we get for fulfilling the purpose of life. Spiritual growth, or growth of consciousness, is the purpose of life, and love is the key to its fulfillment. Adopting spiritual growth as the purpose of life brings joy, peace, harmony, good health and fulfillment to the individual, and creates a better world.

Impact on education

No system of education can be complete unless it takes into account the totality of the individual. The individual is not just the body and the mind; behind these instruments is the soul. The soul is not just a passive spectator; it also has a dynamic aspect which participates in life and evolves with the individual. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have used the term 'psychic being' for this dynamic aspect of the soul. **The psychic being provides individual-specific guidance about the right choice in each situation.** Acting on this voice brings joy and lasting mental peace, whereas ignoring it leads to recurrent uneasiness. In children, the psychic being is wide awake. The job of the teacher is to make the child aware of it through appropriate stories and by making good use of various situations that arise in the classroom. The result is that the child becomes aware of an in-built system of reward and punishment. Every time the child does something right or good, it experiences joy and lasting mental peace – that is the reward. On the other hand, doing wrong or evil leads to a sense of guilt and recurrent uneasiness – that is the punishment. **It is this punishment that nobody can escape.** This realization is the key to preparation for life. Hence, if education has to be preparation for life rather than for making a living, not only the body and the mind should



be developed to become better instruments, the child should also cultivate the habit of using these instruments in light of the guidance emanating from the dynamic aspect of the soul, the psychic being. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have used the term psychic education to describe this facet of education. Psychic education is the pivot around which the education of the body and the mind revolves in their system of education, called integral education. Psychic education is what distinguishes integral education from holistic education which may stop with the development of the body and the mind, and also from value education in which a set of values and morals may be an add-on. **In integral education, psychic education is woven seamlessly and imperceptibly into the system; it is not an add-on.**

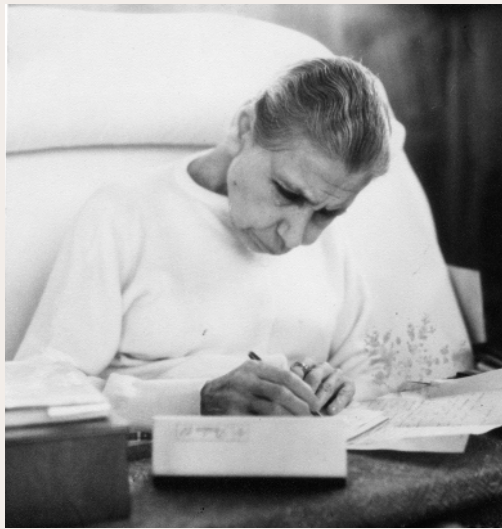
Conclusion

For historical reasons, ancient Indian wisdom is a treasure that India is not using as much as it should be. Although this wisdom is available in contemporary terms, and enough material is available on its application in the fields of education, healthcare, psychology, management, and virtually every field of life, we have been content to be poor copies of the West. But the fact is that the West, after having gone through many failed experiments, has today started looking at ancient Indian wisdom for reducing physical and mental misery and suffering. The key to correcting this anomaly lies in education. We need radical reforms in our education system so that schools and colleges turn out citizens who understand life, and know how to use the vehicle of life for fulfilling its deeper and higher purpose. Joy, peace and fulfillment will follow spontaneously as by-products.

First presented as a paper at an Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) Seminar titled 'Exploring the Meaning of Life' held at the Amity Institute of Education, NOIDA, from 15-17 March 2017



The Psychic Mirror



This is life. One stumbles and falls on the first occasion. One tells oneself: "Oh! one cannot always be so serious," and when the other part returns, once again, one repents bitterly: "I was a fool, I have wasted my time, now I must begin again..."

There is but one remedy: that signpost must always be there, a mirror well placed in one's feelings, impulses, all one's sensations. One sees them in this mirror. There are some which are not very beautiful or pleasant to look at; there are others which are beautiful, pleasant and must be kept. This one does a hundred times a day if necessary. And it is very interesting. One draws a kind of big circle around the psychic mirror and arranges all the elements around it. If there is something that is not all right, it casts a sort of grey shadow upon the mirror: this element must be shifted, organised. It must be spoken to, made to understand, one must come out of that darkness. If you do that, you never get bored.

The Mother ('The Great Adventure', p.64)

All the pages of The Mother's work, 'The Great Adventure', in Tara Didi's voice, have been uploaded on the YouTube channel of Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. The link to the playlist is: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbJ59iL6vu-UXeufBeKQlUTwGf3GhZ9LJ>



The Triple Enigma

Existence, consciousness and the significance of our conscious being, — a triple enigma confronts us when we look at them to discover their origin, foundations, nature, their innermost secret. **We begin with a riddle, we end with a mystery.**

Existence itself is the first riddle. What it is we do not know, we are ignorant how it came to be at all, we cannot say whether it is an eternal fact or a temporary phenomenon. It may be only an appearance or it may be real, not in itself but as a manifestation of some hidden Reality; but then of what is it the manifestation and how came it into being or why had it to be?

Consciousness of existence is a second insoluble miracle. It seems not to have been and now is and it may be that some day it will not be; yet it is a premier fact and without it being would not know of its own existence. Things might exist, but only as a useless encumbrance of a meaningless space, — consciousness makes being self-aware, gives it a significance. But what then is consciousness? Is it something in the very grain of being or an unstable result or fortuitous accident? To whom does it belong? to the world as a whole? or is it peculiar to individual being? Or has it come from elsewhere into this inanimate and inconscient universe? To what end this entry?

The significance of our conscious being in an inconscient material world is the last and worst enigma. What is the sense and justification of the individual, his consciousness, his feeling of self, his personality? Is our individuality real or apparent, temporary or permanent, a minor circumstance or a central secret of the whole? Has it a meaning in the universe or in something beyond the universe? or is it only a chance outburst of Nature with no sense in it or any but a mechanical purpose?

Sri Aurobindo ('Essays Divine and Human', CWSA Vol. 12, pp. 271-272)



Don't Mistake the Map for the Territory

Michael Virat

A religion is simply a map of the territory. The time has come for humanity to put religious differences in their proper perspective.

We are all sons and daughters of the same God and we are all on a journey back to the Father's home. Enlightenment is inevitable! You can delay it if you want to, but you cannot change your divine inheritance.

Many great ones have gone before us up the spiritual mountain. The teachings that they or their disciples have left behind have grown into the great religions of the world. They are maps of the journey just as different people passing through a forest will have different experiences and record their journey from various perspectives.

How childish and immature it is to ask what is your religion? What is your map of the glorious adventure before us? The great ones cannot give us their experiences, they can only point the way. To say I am a Christian does not even address what your experiences are.

Helena P. Blavatsky was one of the founders of the Theosophical Society and initiated the theosophical movement. Although not a religion, it is still a set of directions for spiritual growth and development. Someone asked her, "Mrs. Blavatsky, are you a Theosophist?" She said, "No, but I am trying to be one."

If Sri Aurobindo could see with greater vision, let's say, 20 miles ahead and other yogas could see only 5 miles ahead, that does not mean the territory to be covered is different. The yogi who completes the 5 miles his map covers does not sit down and stop, he sees another 5 miles and keeps going.

Keep your religions if you find them useful, but don't mistake the map for the territory.

Reproduced from The Call Beyond, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1998, p. 35.



This column carries children's utterances that reflect their innate spiritual wisdom. Readers are encouraged to contribute to this column.

At least As Wise as Solomon

When Solomon the wise was asked for a dictum that would be equally useful in good times as well as bad, he said, "This too shall pass." Although the exact origin of the quote is controversial, its validity is not. The same question was put to two children, around age 12. They possibly did not know what Solomon's answer was. Not knowing Solomon's answer proved to be an asset because they applied their minds and came up with four original answers: "Gratitude," "Kindness," "Love," and "Be yourself."



Spirit is infinite consciousness, even when it dwells upon finite formulations of conscious being.

Awareness of spirit is infinite self-awareness.

All its three essential principles must have this character of infinity.

Infinite self-conscious bliss is the first; infinite self-conscious conscious energy is the second; infinite self-conscious existence the third principle of spirit. Existence, consciousness, bliss are the three tones of infinity, the three basic colours of the Absolute.

Sri Aurobindo, 'Essays Divine and Human', CWSA Vol. 12, p. 311.



The Throes of Covid Melancholia

Dr. N. Ananthakrishnan

*A year and a half ago it was, when Covid 19 showed its face,
From bats, apparently the virus to humans made its way,
Very soon it seemed to better like its new found race,
No matter how it started, mankind began its deadly race that day.*

*Ignorance of the virus' path ruled the roost,
It began with lockdowns lasting for weeks and months,
Hand washing, masking, social distancing got a boost,
Still millions got infected in spite of forced "bandhs."*

*Little by little, knowledge gained, light at last shone,
On methods of preventing the spread of the beast,
Still, jobs lost, massive migrations, deaths full blown,
The world was rocked while the virus had a human feast.*

*Headless chicken became the **Homo sapiens** race,
Anxious eyes, wrinkled foreheads, ears ringed by mask strings,
As the world went round and round with covered face,
Nowhere to go, it seemed the world had lost its wings.*

*Came September '20, we seemed to get our bearings back,
For the first time, daily infected numbers seemed to slack,
It appeared that life was not all that gloomy, bleak and black
Light at the end of the tunnel one hoped would come back.*

*Then came the promise of hordes of vaccines,
Suspensions, rumors galore, led to vaccine hesitancy,
Endless fears, overconfidence, countless controversies,
Hence demand became slack with no signs of buoyancy.*

*The world relaxed, all restrictions abandoned,
Came back the virus with regained strength,*



*The old scenes rewound, hospitals full, countless pyres burned,
Stretching queues at hospitals, gained in length.*

*Had humans lost their collective minds,
Massive rallies, no precautions to be seen,
As the political jamboree endlessly winds,
No one cares, it's as if the past has never been.*

*Vaccine hesitancy gave place to vaccine craving,
Too little, too late, no drug available for the jab,
Vaccine shortage led in desperation to crowds leaving,
Only to go in vain to another place, another center, another lab.*

*New scenarios and as yet unexplored track,
In a country of excess production, deaths due to oxygen lack,
What a pity, that trucks were stopped at borders for men to sack,
The breath of life, became a target for some to steal and hack.*

*No one knows, when, if at all, it will end,
Rulers are mad, men have lost the reasoning trend,
When can one say we have crossed the bend?
Or must one wait for Gods to come and mend.*

*We have seen chaos, political jamborees, indifferent governance,
Selfishness, hoarding and black marketing of drugs,
Lack of coordination, mismanagement beyond remembrance,
Realization has come too late, mankind to fix has many bugs.*

*There are lessons to learn, time for sanity to return,
"All will be well" only when there is wellness for "each and every one",
"No man is an island," said the great poet John Donne,
For the world to be healthy, mankind must work as one.*

Editor's Note: Now that the worst of the Covid pandemic is behind us, we can look with some amusement and relief at this poem written by a medical doctor in May 2021.



In this column, we try to answer three types of questions: those related to spiritual quest ('aspiring high'); those related to psychological issues ('feeling low'); and those related to physical health ('frailties of the flesh'). It is needless to say that the identity of the person asking the question is kept confidential if the question is about a sensitive issue. The questions may be sent to callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in.

Why

B wants to know:

Why is there a multiplicity of paths of yoga?

Answer:

Yoga is education, and in education one of the basic principles is that the teaching-learning process should be guided by the interests, inclinations, temperament, capacity, and preferably also by the passions of the student. Since we are all different in these respects, we get attracted to different paths of yoga. Thus, the multiplicity of paths of yoga is for reasons similar to those for which there is a multiplicity of courses offered by a college or a university.



Wholeness and connectedness are what are most fundamental in our nature as human beings.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Full Catastrophe Living', p. 161.

Life only unfolds in moments.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, 'Full Catastrophe Living', p. 173.



Feedback and Encouraging Words

Mother's Miracles in My Life! - Gratitude!

Dearest Tara Di,

Twelve weeks back, I came to Gate no.6 of the Ashram, thinking that it was the gate to The Mother's International School. I was looking for a job in the school. And, I found my all and I lost my all in the same afternoon!

I met you and Vijay di for 5 minutes. Forget the job, you had no work for me even as a volunteer, as the school was shutting that day. You told me "You have come very late" and something in me said out aloud, "No worries, I am here to stay."

You said to me, "Have lunch with us anyway at 12.30 before you go." I asked, what I would do for so long. Since I am an artist, you said "Go and see the art gallery." I took the keys to the locked-up gallery. It was full of art works and paintings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother! That's when I first saw my Mother's face.

I sat there, and tears started rolling down my eyes. I was melting in ways I didn't know existed. I have never felt what I did...so much love...and so many tears...the quality of these tears unknown to me...they came from some place else...they were the sweetest tears...and I felt light like never before...and I felt held like never before...and I felt like I know nothing and everything like never before!

I have no capacity to surrender...only her Grace can cause such surrender...and love...

I want to share with you and Vijay Di the Mother's Grace and Blessings.

Tara didi, I had told you "I am looking for a job because I need money" and you said, "don't worry about money, the



Mother will take care of that"...and I just stopped worrying about money... that very moment, just like that! The Mother took away my worry... in that moment... my goal of finding a job dropped in a second... as my purpose of life started dawning on me!

I started conducting, with your encouragement, an Art workshop for the Vocational Trainees (VTs) of the Ashram, and started attending Shri Prashant Khanna's classes on 'Savitri'. I also had the time to meditate with Ma for an hour in between the VT's workshop and the 'Savitri' class!

Instead of looking for a job as a teacher, the Mother opened ways for me to conduct Teacher's training sessions at various schools in Delhi for social and emotional learning, and Art integration in the curriculum. I have trained over 300 teachers in the last 3 months!

I was looking for rented / shared spaces to teach in... I now own a Studio and Art Lab – and I am running programs for Self-realization through Art for children and adults based on the Mother's teachings there.

I also got a job as a Social Emotional Learning consultant twice a week for an International Board school. The Mother took care of me, beyond all my imagination and expectations.

These are some tangible things through which I have experienced the workings of Her Grace in my life...but the real thing – how the Mother has filled my life with Her Love and Light – that I will never be able to express in words.

I have now stopped knocking at doors...I wait for my Mother to open the doors for me. Whether it is pain or pleasure, sorrow or delight, I shall walk them all, for I no more walk them – She carries me through every door! Her Grace does...Her Will is all there is. She brought me to Gate no. 6 of the Ashram, a 'mistake' that opened a path to align with Her will! So magically!



I started my journey as a seeker when I was eleven... seeking love n rest. I have finally found home at 42. Gratitude to all my past gurus; Gratitude to you Tara Didi for opening the ashram gates for me, Gratitude to you Vijay di for making bridges for me to work at the ashram, and Gratitude to each and every VT of mine for making ways for me to be home in my Mother's arms, for all their love and smiles! Finally, I am home, with my Mother.

Thank you for all your love!

With sincere gratitude,

All my love

(Name withheld to protect privacy)

In an email dated 15 August 2023



The complete Yoga will be one which accepts God in the world and oneness with all beings and solidarity with the human kind, fills life and existence with the God-consciousness and not only raises man the individual but leads man the race towards a total perfection.

Sri Aurobindo, 'Essays Divine and Human', CWSA Vol. 12, p. 335.

Thought in the mind can at most be Truth's brilliant and transparent garment; it is not even her body. Look through the robe, not at it, and you may see some hint of her form.

Sri Aurobindo

Knowing what you are doing while you are doing it is the essence of mindfulness practice.

Jon Kabat-Zinn ('Full Catastrophe Living', p. 28)



Contact us

Our quarterly magazine in Hindi, '**Sri Aravind Karmadhara**', is also available on-line now, and may be viewed on our website www.sriaurobindoashram.net.

For a free subscription to '**Sri Aravind Karmadhara**', please send an e-mail to sakarmdhara@gmail.com

To get '**The Call Beyond**' online regularly, month after month, please send an e-mail to: callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in

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Note

In view of the Hundred and Fiftieth Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo on 15 August 2022, the Ashram is expanding its mailing list to reach out to more and more who may benefit from the teachings of the Master and the Mother. To get included in the Mailing List, please go to <http://erp.saaonline.net.in/addcontacts.cfm> to fill in a form, which will take you only a few minutes.



Get in touch with Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch on:

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Feedback

Please send your feedback to
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