

The Call Beyond

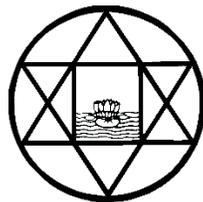


Volume 46, No. 5

May 2021

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An Online Publication of
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM – DELHI BRANCH

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The End of a Glorious Innings

PROFESSOR MANOJ DAS
(27 February 1934- 27 April 2021)



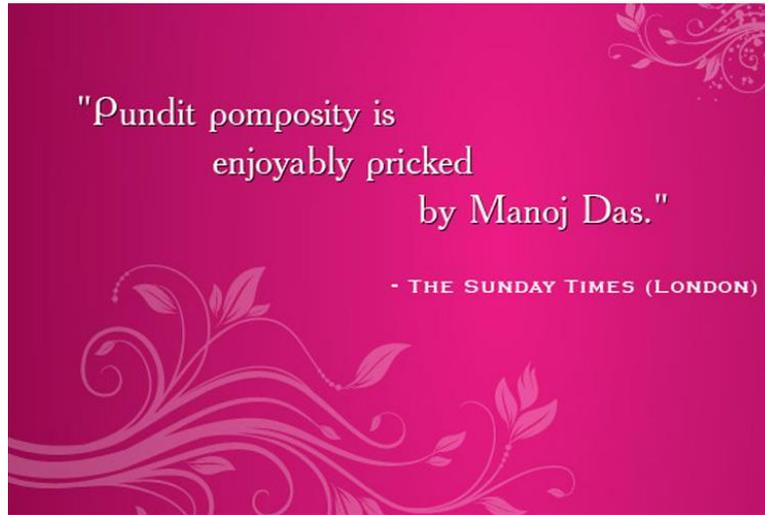
The many modes and moods of Manoj-Da, and the house in which he was born
(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TheMother21/photos/a.4289812047704794/4289825507703448>)

Professor Manoj Das, one of the foremost devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and a distinguished bilingual writer, left his terrestrial body to be in the Mother's lap on 27 April 2021. He was born on 27 February 1934 in an affluent family living in village Sankhari in the Balasore district of Odisha, a village which had plenty of greenery, lakes and innocent inhabitants but was inaccessible even to bullock carts. But that did not shield him from traumatic experiences in childhood. As a child, he saw a cyclone, a famine, and he saw his house being robbed by gangs of bandits twice, the first time when he was just eight. But he grew up normally, went out of the village to study in school and college. As a college student, he was pained by sorrow and suffering in the world, and his search for a solution drew him to Marxism. It is said that if at sixteen, you are not

a communist, there is something wrong with you; and if at sixty, you are still a communist, there is again something wrong with you. Manoj Das was a normal, idealistic, fiery young man at sixteen. But he did not wait till sixty to switch gears. Much before that, he discovered Sri Aurobindo and realised on one hand that the root cause of misery is the present average level of human consciousness, and was reassured on the other by the Master's vision that the level will rise in the near future. After teaching English in Christ College at Cuttack for just four years, he and his wife, Pratijna Devi, moved to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, for good in 1963. He was assigned the role of teaching English and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy at the Sri Aurobindo International School of Education (SAICE), which he continued to do till the very end.

Manoj-Da, as he was popularly called, was a born writer. Equally at home with English and his mother tongue, Odia, his first book was a collection of Odia poems, *Satavdira Artanada*, which was published in 1949. He launched a literary Odia magazine, *Diganta*, in 1950. His first collection of short stories, *Samudrara Kshudha* (Hungry sea) was published in 1951, the year in which he finished high school. He continued writing when he was in college. As a college student, he published a novel, *Jeebanara Swada*, a collection of short stories, *Vishakanyar Kahani*, and a collection of poems, *Padadhawani*. He edited a monthly cultural magazine, *The Heritage*, published in Chennai by the Chandamama group from 1985-1989. For several years at a time, he contributed regular columns to leading publications such as *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *The Statesman*, and *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. In his large number of books, in both Odia and English, there is hardly a genre that he has not touched. He has written for scholars and for the general public; for adults as well as children; fiction as well as non-fiction; novels, novelettes and short stories; prose as well as poetry. His works include biography, philosophy, mysticism, mythology and travelogues. The one thing he did not write was his autobiography. When asked by some of his innumerable fans scattered all over the world to write one, he said that there were far more worthy and eventful lives than his and he would not like to burden the catalogue with his! Self-effacing, as always! Some of his best known books are *Myths, Legends, Concepts and Literary Antiquities of India*; *Tales Told by Mystics*; *My Little India*; *Cyclones*; *The Escapist*; *The Fourth Friend*; *A Bride Inside a Casket and Other Tales*; *The Bridge in the Moonlit Night and Other Stories: A Selection by the Author Manoj Das*; *Story of Krishna*; *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*; *Sri Aurobindo*; *Sri Aurobindo on Education*; and of course must be mentioned, his just-published magnum opus, *Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi* (reviewed in this

issue of *The Call Beyond* on page 10). He wrote almost an equal number of books in Odia and English, and many of his works have been translated into several Indian and foreign languages. Many research scholars have done their doctoral thesis on the works of Manoj Das, P. Raja being the first one to do so.



(Source: www.worldofmanojdas.in)

Although he never worked for any awards and rewards, he was a highly decorated author. Just to mention very few of the numerous recognitions that were bestowed on him: Padma Shri (2001); Padma Bhushan (2020); the first Sri Aurobindo Puraskar; the highest honour of the Sahitya Academy, the Fellowship of the Sahitya Academy; India's highest literary award, Saraswati Samman; and an honorary doctorate from five universities.

As a person, Manoj-Da never missed an opportunity to praise somebody, and was reluctant to criticize anybody. He was humble to the core. Although he had several raving fans who would willingly turn the world upside down to fulfill his wishes, he never asked anybody for anything. But the Mother ensured that his mind was read by one of his fans, and they would take care of him. It happened not once but several times that he would go to a place, unannounced, so that he could have solitude and travel as he liked in a taxi. But lo and behold, there would be a car sent by a fan to receive him, and the vehicle would be at his disposal for going wherever he wanted to go. He was fond of

travelling. But he looked at the places he visited not like a typical tourist but as a historian, a social scientist, an anthropologist, and a mystic – all rolled into one. His much-reprinted travelogue, *My Little India*, is an interesting collection of stories culled from his visits all over the country, his interactions there with ordinary as well as extraordinary people, his intuitive flashes and his unusually deep insights. Above all, what makes the travelogue eminently readable are his characteristic knack for storytelling, and his wit and humour.

Although Manoj-Da had been unwell for quite some time, we felt a deep sense of loss when he left the body. A tribute paid to him by the residents of Auroville says, “Manoj-Da always remained humble, always approachable, always smiling, always ready with a story with a deep message to connect to a higher consciousness.” Dakshina, an American admirer of his from Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, Lodi, California, wrote in an e-mail, “Manoj-Da was one of the Mother's tireless instruments, always quietly cheerful and helpful – a wise and clear-sighted mentor, and a marvelous story teller, with a sparkling sense of humour. ... I will dearly miss his wise and heartfelt counsel and spiritual friendship. May his wonderful soul fly straight to the Mother's Embrace and well-deserved rest in the psychic realms. May we meet again in future lives....” What Dakshina wrote echoes the feelings of all those who knew him. Manoj-Da, we will miss you.

For more about Prof. Manoj Das, you may see:

His website: www.worldofmanojdas.in (a labour of love created by Nirvay Ranjan Padhi, Gautam Sutar and Subhashree Das)

A 27-minute film ‘Shri Manoj Das: On the Crest of the Horizon’ on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qftpgWk0aVc> or <https://auromaa.org/shri-manoj-das-on-the-crest-of-the-horizon/> (a labour of love created by Prafulla Mohanty)

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manoj_Das

Tributes to Prof. Manoj Das

"There are only a few good
storytellers left in the world today
and one of them is Manoj Das."

- RUSKIN BOND IN IMPRINT

Das resists the over-investments of moralising and sentimentality in a prose of sometimes rigorous realism, though delighting in the offbeat, ridiculous and the unexplained. ... In all, Manoj Das serves up an enjoyable mix of comedy and serious social comment, fashioned by a pen which knows craft.

Scot Findlay (in 'CRNEL Review Journal', University of Wollongong, Australia)

Manoj Das is one of those writers who can express in simple language items of considerable importance while entertaining you, while making you laugh or cry, happy or sad. Manoj Das is a rare person in today's world...

John Harvey (in 'The British Fantasy Society Bulletin')

What is Manoj Das?

A social commentator?

A psychiatrist?

A sly peeper into people's hearts?

Or just a plain storyteller? ...

Manoj Das is all this, and an incorrigible Indian besides.

M.V. Kamath (in 'The Week')

How much I have enjoyed – but that is too feeble a word – how much I have vibrated to the stories! How can it be that, bound as I am to things Indian, I had not come across them till now? I have been trying to decide which of the stories I have just finished I admire most... But at every five minutes my mind changes.

H.R.F. Keating

Asked by one interviewer which language, English or Oriya, he usually thought in, he responded, “In the language of silence, if that does not sound pretentious” ... in the world of Das’s imagination there is only one unforgivable sin, which is also a sin he is incapable of committing. You cannot imagine Manoj Das being pretentious.

Niranjan S. Roy (in ‘The Hindustan Times’)

There is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great storyteller ... He shows how powerfully all artifices of storytelling can be used to write in realist genre without any attempt at being faithful to the photographic details of facts. ... He proves that reality is richer than what realists conceived it to be.

A. Russell (in ‘Poetry Time’)

Despite the ambience of fantasy, a hardcore of realistic predicaments and problems underlines his stories.

‘The Straits Times’ (Singapore)

This is the secret of Manoj Das’s style: he can present characters and situations with a dead-pan ‘so-it-was’ and we listen like a three year old, the mariner hath his will.

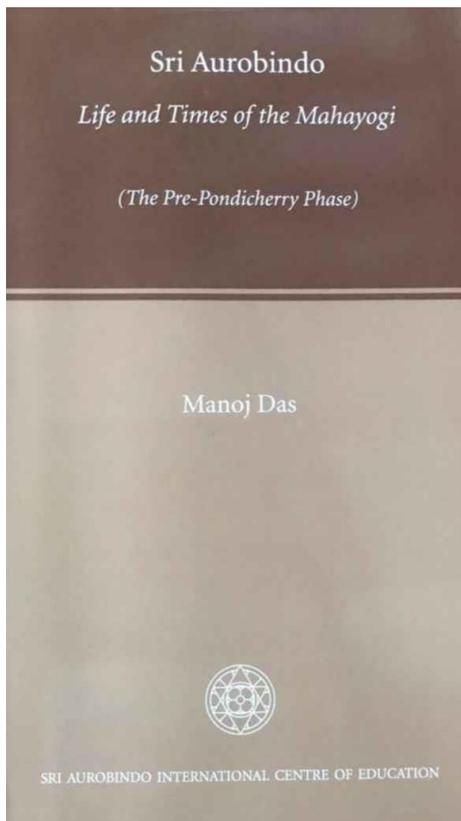
P.S. Sundaram (in ‘The Book Review’)

(Source: www.worldofmanojdas.in)

book review

The Swansong of a Self-Denying Genius

Sri Aurobindo: *Life and Times of the Mahayogi (The Pre-Pondicherry Phase)* by Manoj Das. Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 2020. Pp. 716. ISBN 978-93-5210-228-0. Rs. 750.



The history and evolution of this remarkable book, destined to become a classic, goes back to 50 years. The author learnt in 1971 that the confidential correspondence between Lord Minto and Lord Morley, the two gentlemen who once occupied the two highest positions in British India, was no longer confidential and was available in Old India Office Library, London. “Curious to learn what these ‘two Lords’ thought of him [Sri Aurobindo],” Prof. Manoj Das sought the help of the industrialist, Shri Ghanshyam Das Birla. He asked Shri Birla if his London office could arrange to get copies of the relevant documents from London. Shri Birla responded with the offer that he would be happy to fund Prof. Manoj Das’ travel to London for the purpose. Prof. Das placed the offer before the Mother, and She approved it. Prof. Das visited London. Much of his time there was spent on copying documents in longhand – those were not the days of photocopying! But he felt amply rewarded because he found much more in the material than he had expected. On his return, The Mother was very pleased with the information collected. The major outcome of the visit was a book, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*, published in 1972, the Birth Centenary Year of Sri Aurobindo. The

present book is a much more comprehensive work on the same theme. It was serialised during the period April 2011 through November 2017 in the *Mother India*, the monthly magazine published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. This precious work that has grown and developed over 50 years is now available between the covers of this elegant hardcover book, just in time for the One hundred and fiftieth Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo.

After the first three highly engaging introductory chapters, the fourth chapter creates the atmosphere of the times. From the fifth chapter onwards begins an account of Sri Aurobindo's life, as seen on the surface, in chronological order. This goes on till the last chapter, Chapter 64, in which Sri Aurobindo reaches Pondicherry. The chapter ends with the sentence: "Now that the freedom of India had been decreed, at Pondicherry began his unprecedented adventure in consciousness – his Yoga for the freedom of mankind from its primeval bondage to ignorance that alone could enable its ascent to a new phase of evolution." But the last chapter is not the end of the book. After this are two Postscripts. The first one is on a debate on Sri Aurobindo in the British House of Commons in 1910, in which Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party, goes on to question the arrest warrant against Sri Aurobindo issued on 7 April 1910 on the basis of an article in *Karmayogin*. The second Postscript is on the discomfiture of the British Government at not being able to detect the escape of Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry, and the proceedings of the *Karmayogin* case. The documents reproduced in both the Postscripts were collected by the author in the Old India Office Library, London. After the two Postscripts comes the climax, the Epilogue. The epilogue is about the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, which seeks to transform every part of the being, including the physical. However, despite being engrossed in this unprecedented Yoga, Sri Aurobindo managed to find time to answer through handwritten letters the queries of his ever-growing number of disciples, and to intervene in world affairs at crucial points, the most notable being his intervention to defeat in the Second World War the Asuric forces symbolized by Hitler. The epilogue ends with the author's fond hope that before long a comprehensive account of the Pondicherry phase of Sri Aurobindo's life would also emerge "probably for the readers of a more receptive generation."

To the world, Sri Aurobindo became a Mahayogi in Pondicherry. One might wonder why in the title of this book, which deals with only the pre-Pondicherry phase of his life, he



has been called a Mahayogi. The author explains that in fact, there was enough in Sri Aurobindo's life even before he went to Pondicherry which justifies the title. For example, when Sri Aurobindo was in Baroda, he lived in a palatial house which he had been provided, and earned a princely salary. But he dressed up very simply, seldom went to the market to buy any clothes,

could happily be in a hot room without a fan, never had any complaint about food irrespective of how lazy and ignorant the cook was, and never got angry. He received his salary once in three months as a bagful of coins. He emptied the bag in a tray and left the money exposed for any needy person to take it. When asked why he did that, he simply laughed and said, "Well, it is a proof that we are living in the midst of good and honest people" (p. 109). These anecdotes, and many more, not only make the book interesting but also reveal to the reader the Mahayogi in disguise that Sri Aurobindo already was. His companion at Baroda, Dinendra Kumar Roy, said, "... I realised that Aurobindo was not a mortal human, but a god descended under curse" (p. 104).

Researched biographies are generally dull, and valuable primarily as reference books. But not so in this case. The author, fondly called Manoj-Da, was a story teller. Generously sprinkled with anecdotes told in a gripping style, he has created an unputdownable researched biography. The book is also richly illustrated with rare labelled photographs of great historical value. He wanted to continue writing in the same style about the Pondicherry phase of Sri Aurobindo's life too. He had the material in him, but not the time left in this life to put it down on paper. He intuitively knew that, and therefore took a conscious decision to conclude the work. Let us hope that, by the Mother's Grace, he will return as one of those "sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn" * who will give "a more receptive generation" Volume II of the Life and Times of the Mahayogi.

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*Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, Book 3, Canto 4, line 353

springboard

.....
Many a bud never bloom for want of care. The country is full of budding young people handicapped by the environment in which they grow up, which prevents them from realizing their full potential. Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch has had the privilege of nurturing thousands of such boys and girls, and also the joy of seeing them bloom. In this column, we shall bring you stories of the difference that the Ashram made to their lives.
.....

Life is a Game



Here is the story of Khasti Adhikari, Sports Teacher at Matrikiran School, Gurugram, in her own words:

“My name is Khasti Adhikari. I was born in Village Dhunga in the Almora district of Uttarakhand. One of the best things that happened to me in life was that I came from my village to Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch in the year 2013 to do a vocational training program. I was selected for the hand-made paper department. During the course, besides paper craft, I got a chance to learn English and computer. With the other youngsters I played every evening. I also

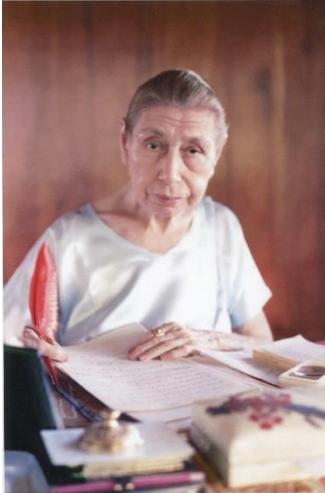
participated in cultural programs. After finishing the course, I stayed on in the Ashram for more experience. Seeing my physical fitness and interest in sports, I was given an opportunity to assist the sports teacher in The Mother’s International School. After some time, I felt confident to teach sports. I left the Ashram in 2017 when I found a job as a Sports Teacher in Matrikiran School, Gurugram.



“The Ashram helped me not only build my career but also helped me cultivate discipline and time management. I got an opportunity to explore many avenues such as art and craft, theatre, sports and mountaineering. I got to meet young people from different parts of the country and became familiar with their language, food and dress. I could develop my creativity, self-expression and leadership qualities. I started thinking about my aim in life. Now I feel confident to work with children of all age groups. All this happened because of the safe, peaceful, loving and caring environment of the Ashram, for which I will always remain grateful.”

words of the mother

It Is Not What One Does



It is not what one does (what one does is very important, that's evident) that is the most important thing but what one is. Whatever the activity, it is not quite the way of doing it but the state of consciousness in which it is done that is important. You may work, do disinterested work without any idea of personal profit, work for the joy of working, but if you are not at the same time ready to leave this work, to change the work or change the way of working, if you cling to your own way of working, your surrender is not complete. You must come to a point when everything is done because you feel within, very clearly, in a more and more imperious way, that it is this which must be done and in this particular way, and that you do it only because of that. You do not do it because of any habit, attachment or preference, nor even any conception, even a preference for the idea that it is the best thing to do – else your surrender is not total.

THE MOTHER ('The Great Adventure', p. 31)

.....

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 channel is: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcmF6JzAOsBMdqJjZbnmyng>

words of the master

Matter

Life and Mind are in the fact of evolution conditioned by the body and therefore by the principle of Matter. The body is the chief difficulty in the way of a spiritual transformation of life; it has therefore been regarded by spiritual aspiration as an enemy and the escape from the material existence has been made an indispensable condition of the final emancipation. The quarrel begins with the struggle between Life and Matter with the apparent defeat of life in death as its constant circumstance; it continues with the struggle of the Mind against the life and the body and culminates with the struggle of the spirit against all its instruments; but the right end and solution of these discords is not an escape and a severance but the complete victory of the higher over the lower. We have to examine the problem of the reality of Matter. Our present experience of Matter does not give us its truth; for Matter is only an appearance of the Reality, a form of its force-action presented to the principle of sense in the universal consciousness. As Mind is only a final dividing action of Supermind and Life of Conscious-Force working in the conditions of the Ignorance, so Matter as we know it is only the final form taken by conscious-being as the result of that same working. Mind precipitating itself into Life to create form gives to the universal principle of Being the appearance of material substance instead of pure substance, that is to say, of substance offering itself to the contact of mind as a stable thing or object. This contact of mind with its object is Sense. In the divine Mind there is a movement which presents to the divine Knower the forms of Himself as objects to His knowledge and this would create a division between the Knower and the object of knowledge if there were not at the same time, inevitably, another movement by which He feels the object as Himself. This movement, in the divided state of existence created by dividing Mind, is represented to us as the contact of sense which becomes a basis for contact through the thought-mind by which we return towards unity. Since the action of Mind is to divide infinitely the one infinite existence, Matter, the result of that action, becomes in its apparent nature an infinite atomic division and atomic aggregation of infinite substance. But its reality is one and indivisible, even as is the reality of Life and of Mind. Matter is Sachchidananda represented to His own mental experience as a formal basis of objective knowledge, action and delight.

Sri Aurobindo ('Essays in Philosophy and Yoga', pp. 480-481)

twenty-five years ago

Life – As I Know It

Divya Chandrasekhar

VIII A, MIS

It's misery, it's pain,
It's feelings all over again,
It's you, it's me,
It's ecstasy.
It's a bird, it's a new-found self,
It's life.

It's the brain, it's a thought,
It's like friends who've recently fought.
It's like foes who've become friends.
It's like a road which never ends.
It's a touch, it's a gift,
It's a talent,
It's life.

Reproduced from *The Call Beyond*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 35, 1996

The whole of our life should be a prayer offered to the Divine. ...

Our life should be governed by the love for Truth and the thirst for Light.

THE MOTHER

Reflex Overrides Reason

.....
Most animals do not usually attack unless they are menaced or frightened or somehow made angry – and they can feel the atmosphere of people.

Sri Aurobindo

.....

Sweet Children of the Sweet Mother,

Are you afraid of snakes and scorpions? If you are, you are not alone. Human beings generally are. It is an instinct of the human race. It is built into us, just as avoiding poisonous grass is an instinct built into cows. These instincts, which are in-built responses of an animal, are protective in nature. Probably the fear of snakes and scorpions does protect us from these animals to some extent.



But human beings are more complex than cows and other animals. A human being may observe snakes and discover that they are harmless if left alone. A human being may study snakes and find that eighty percent of them are non-poisonous. A human being may conclude that fear of snakes is irrational. Therefore, a human being may decide not to be afraid of snakes. A human being may find a snake beautiful. A human being may see the

Divine in a snake. Therefore, a human being may love snakes.

The Mother has narrated an experiment conducted by a French scientist on himself. He wanted to find, to what extent the knowledge that a snake could not harm him could overcome the instinctive fear of snakes. The scientist went to a public park in Paris, which also had several animals, as in a zoo. The park had snakes in glass enclosures. The glass of these enclosures was so thick that it would not break no matter how hard the snake strikes it. The scientist went and stood in front of the enclosure of a big black snake that had the reputation of being very short-tempered. The snake at that time was awake and hungry; when it was well-fed, the snake used to sleep off. The scientist went very close to the enclosure and started irritating the snake. The snake got angry. The scientist went on irritating it. And, finally the snake “coiled up and shot out like a released spring against the glass, against the face of the gentleman who was on the other side.” The man

knew that the glass was so thick that the snake could not harm him, but still he jumped back. The scientist repeated the experiment several times, with the same result. He would resolve in advance that he would stay stiff when the snake shot at him; after all the snake could not harm him. But no matter how firmly he resolved, every time the snake jumped, the man recoiled back.

The biological explanation for the scientist's behaviour is that instinctive and reflex responses involve a relatively simple and short neural circuitry, and are therefore quick. The circuitry of a reflex response does not incorporate the cerebral cortex, which is the channel for our thoughts. Thinking involves the cerebral cortex, and therefore a longer neural circuitry, and consequently a thought-out response takes a little longer than a reflex response. By the time a person is able to apply his mind to decide what to do, the reflex action is already over!

(Source: youtube.com / Google images)



One experiment the scientist did not do is perhaps because he did not love snakes. If he had sent loving vibrations to the snake, the snake might have responded by coming closer to the scientist but would

not have jumped at him angrily, and the scientist would not have recoiled. Fear can be overcome by love, not by reason.

We shall continue this dialogue month after month. In the meantime, do two things. *First*, keep your ears open to the whispers of the intelligence hidden in all the animals in your surroundings. *Secondly*, if you have any questions, please send an e-mail to callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in.

With love, CB

(Based on *Whispers of Nature*. Edited by Vijay. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1981, pp. 53-54)

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For a 3-minute video '9-Year-Old Snake Handler Krista Guarino' you may go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTEmrNr5WLC>

tip of the month

This column shall carry advice, practices or exercises which can make it a little easier for the spiritual seeker to walk on the path of spiritual progress. Contributions from readers are welcome, and may be printed at the editor's discretion after editorial revision.

Before You Speak, T H I N K

**A WISE MAN SPEAKS
BECAUSE HE HAS
SOMETHING TO SAY,
A FOOL SPEAKS
BECAUSE HE HAS TO
SAY SOMETHING
-PLATO-**

Is it **T**RUE ?

Is it **H**ELPFUL ?

Is it **I**NSPIRING ?

Is it **N**CESSARY ?

Is it **K**IND ?

Three things that never come back: the spent arrow; the spoken word; the lost opportunity.

William George Plunkett

may i help you

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.

Going Deeper Than Techniques

'S' wants to know:

- 1. Which are the breathing exercises that one should do if one has coronavirus infection? Would alternate nostril breathing, bhastrika and bhramari help?*
- 2. Which are the exercises that are the best for 'increasing lung capacity', and which are the ones that should be avoided?*
- 3. Is Jala-neti helpful during covid?*

Before answering these questions, a few general points would be helpful to understand.

First, to talk of just 'coronavirus infection' does not mean much today. It could mean anything from being 'Covid-positive but asymptomatic' to being 'Covid-positive with severe symptoms such as low oxygen saturation and therefore requiring hospitalisation', and many shades of manifestation between these two extremes. Naturally, the advice would not be the same in all cases.

Secondly, being found Covid-positive creates in many a sense of fear and panic. That is unwarranted because most Covid-positive individuals remain asymptomatic. Further, being Covid-positive should not surprise anybody. To understand this, suppose we have a test that detects the presence of food in the mouth. The sensitivity of the test is such that the result is positive in anybody who has had a meal within the last one hour. Since we have three meals a day, in tests done at random throughout the day, about one-third of the population will test positive. It does not mean that the two-third who test negative do not eat. It only means they probably took a meal more than an hour ago. Our test is not sensitive enough to pick them up. Further, some 'sensible' people would have rinsed

the mouth immediately after the meal. They will test negative even ten minutes after a meal – these will be our false negatives. On the other hand, some people who have taken only a sugary drink will test positive, although they have not taken a meal – these will be our false positives. But, in one sense, the test is meaningless because everybody eats, and therefore, everybody will sooner or later test positive if we persist and keep repeating the test on those who have tested negative. In the current context, we are all breathing air which has some coronavirus. The only way to breathe air which has no coronavirus at all is to stop breathing! Therefore, to test positive is no surprise. If somebody is Covid-negative after being tested, it just means that the viral population in the nose and throat was so low that the test could not detect it. However, although everybody is, in a way, covid-positive, it does not call for fear and panic. Up to a point, the body's in-built mechanisms can deal with the virus, and we will not get sick. That is exactly what is happening to most of us, and we remain blissfully unaware of the virus having entered our body, and our body having dealt with it so efficiently that we got no symptoms – not even a cough or fever. The crucial point is that defence mechanisms of the body that are saving most of us are weakened by fear and depression; conversely, they are strengthened by peace and hope.

Thirdly, many techniques for preventing and treating coronavirus infection are going viral because of the ease with which anybody can create and circulate anything these days. Steam inhalation, various combinations of spices and herbs, meditative techniques, *japa* (repetition) of this mantra or that a prescribed number of times (such as 108), and yogic practices such as asanas and pranayamas are some of the techniques being prescribed, and then enthusiastically forwarded on WhatsApp groups. The intentions behind prescribing as well as forwarding are good, but one result of multiple techniques being forwarded is confusion, and begs the question, which of these techniques is better than the others?

To understand that, let us talk of three things: *technique, process and product*.

Techniques unleash a *process* that has *three components*: One, cognitive gain; two, sense of power; and three, quietening of the mind. Cognitive gain means that we know more. We know that something works. Sometimes we are also told how it works. That makes us feel even more empowered. If we are taught only a relaxation technique, we may think

that the unique technique helps. If we are told that the technique relaxes us, we may conclude the technique helps by relaxing us. Sometimes we are told a physical mechanism by which the technique works. For example, high temperature kills the virus, spices boost immunity, or that a particular pranayama releases nitric oxide, which kills the virus. Being rooted in the physical, we find physical mechanisms more convincing than psychological mechanisms. In short, when we know more, we get a sense of power that we can overcome the problem. The sense of power, the confidence, stops for a while questions such as 'What will happen?', 'Will I die?', etc. etc. which lead us nowhere. With these questions suspended at least temporarily, we get a window of silence, a window of peace.

The *product* of the above process is that an atmosphere has been created in the body for the body's defence mechanisms to do their best. Body's defence mechanisms work best when we have faith in our capacity to get better, the faith puts us at peace, and the faith gives us hope.

In short, the number of techniques is much more than the number of processes they unleash, and the product of all the processes is the same: enhancing the body's ability to cope with disease. Thus, techniques are not an end in themselves. *The techniques only create the right atmosphere for a process, just as the lullaby is a technique that creates in the baby the right atmosphere for the process of sleep.* But lullaby is not the only technique, as every parent knows. Many other techniques can also do the same. Same for Covid, or health issues in general. The techniques may be many, but the route by which they work is, in the final analysis, the wisdom planted in the body by the Divine. So, to each his own. Let each person be happy with the technique in which he has faith.

Now, coming to the specific questions put by 'S':

1. *Which are the breathing exercises that one should do if one has coronavirus infection? Would alternate nostril breathing, bhastrika and bhramari help?*

If the person is Covid-positive but asymptomatic, the person can do all the yogic practices except those which may be contraindicated because of the co-morbidities, if any, that the person may have. The person should continue to take

care of his health as if he does not have Covid, except for precautions such as home-isolation, so that he does not transmit the infection to others.

If the person has symptoms, the response would depend on the degree and type of symptoms. To some extent, the person can listen to his body and decide.

Coming specifically to the breathing exercises asked about, *assuming that the person is asymptomatic*:

- Alternate nostril breathing (*anulom-vilom / naadi shuddhi*) would help because it is a relaxing pranayama
- *Bhastrika* may be avoided because it involves both forceful inhalation and forceful exhalation. Forceful inhalation of air containing the virus would not be prudent. Instead, *kapalabhati* may be good because it involves only forceful exhalation. Forcefully pushing the viruses lodged deep in the airways and lungs seems logically desirable.
- *Bhramari* would help because it is a relaxing pranayama. Recently, there has also been talk of humming sounds (as in *Bhramari*) releasing nitric oxide in the airways. The mechanism is plausible because nitric oxide is associated with parasympathetic activation (the division of the nervous system active during relaxation). Whether nitric oxide kills the coronavirus, as has been claimed, is yet to be seen. But nitric oxide does increase blood flow. And if the effect of *Bhramari* is to increase the blood flow in the nose, throat and lungs, it may assist the local respiratory defence mechanisms. Finer details of mechanisms apart, the key is relaxation. We are sure to discover more and more biochemical mechanisms by which relaxation creates the right atmosphere for healing.

2. Which are the exercises that are the best for 'increasing lung capacity', and which are the ones that should be avoided?

In a healthy, or asymptomatic covid-positive person, exercise, in general, would improve respiratory function. Among commonly practiced simple pranayamas:

- Full yogic breathing would improve 'lung capacity' by regular use of the maximum capacity to breathe
- Alternate nostril breathing would help by relaxing the person
- *Kapalabhati* would help by pushing out the virus lodged deep inside
- *Bhramari* would help by relaxing the person. The humming might have additional benefits in the respiratory tract (including the paranasal sinuses).
- About practices to be avoided, among the above, only *kapalabhati* has several contraindications, such as hernia, peptic ulcer, epilepsy, glaucoma, back pain, neck pain, heart disease, high blood pressure, and women during menstruation and during advanced stages of pregnancy. In back pain and neck pain, *kapalabhati* may be done gently, fewer strokes per minute, and with the back/neck supported. In 'mild' cases of heart disease and high blood pressure, *kapalabhati* may be done slowly, only about 20 strokes per minute. A person just starting *kapalabhati*, or an elderly person, should not do it continuously for more than 20 seconds. After a little gap, the person can do it for another 20 seconds, but not continuously.

3. *Is jala-neti helpful during covid?*

Not many know how to do *jala-neti*. If one does not, there is nothing to worry because there are plenty of other extremely useful yogic practices that are much simpler, and adequate for staying fit. But in a healthy person or covid-positive asymptomatic person, who knows how to do it, *jala-neti* is likely to help by washing out the virus from the respiratory tract.

Sorry to make you read 1000 words before answering the three questions straightaway. But it seemed important. And, the full answer (about 1700 words) will take you at the most 10 minutes at the average reading speed.

You Need It More



Shri Narayan Dabhadkar
(Received as a Forward on WhatsApp)

Shri Narayan Dabhadkar died of Covid-19 infection after giving up his hospital bed to save a young man. Many people donate money to save somebody's life, but being ready to give up one's life to save an 'unrelated' person goes much beyond that.

The more one spreads out, the more one has.

The more one gets identified, the more one becomes.

The more one gives, the more one grows.

THE MOTHER

appreciations

Feedback and Encouraging Words

Feedback on Workshop for Science Teachers

(12-17 April 2021)



In this Workshop, Science teachers from 53 schools from different parts of the country came together, interacted and shared each other's classroom experience. We failed and we passed, but ultimately, we learnt so many new things. The kits were so user-friendly. Whenever we think of making models, we always think we will have to rely on expensive materials. But here we learned how to do the work perfectly with minimum resources.

The mental education session with Dr. Ramesh Bijlani was something which opened so many close doors of our mind. The discussion session on Integral Development was commendable. We learnt so many new things that day like how to connect students with the subject as well as how to foster their integral Development.

Another new thing that we learned was that classrooms were beyond the boundaries of a room. Making a parachute with only two simple materials and then flying it successfully was an adventurous experience. By making the models of Handpump, Glider and Rocket we really came to know the actual working of such things only because of the esteemed guidance by Mahak ma'am and Baren sir.

When the rocket launched successfully, our team jumped with joy, and definitely our students will also feel the same. We are eagerly waiting to see their happy faces.

Dr. Aparna Roy, beautifully explained science and values. Values play some role in scientific inquiry. We felt connected to it and surely, we will include the tips given by her in our teachings. We learned how to make students of even junior classes aware of chemical reactions using items available at home. The workshop was beautifully executed to bring together research & practice.

Thank you! We look forward to joining more such workshops.

*Graphite Higher Secondary School Family
Manideep, Raisen (M.P.) 462046*

The simplicity with which Mahak ji explained various experiments and their application in daily life was an amazing experience. Baren ji's emphasis on crosschecking, and injecting some humour sustained our interest throughout the 6 days. We are grateful to the team which conducted the Workshop and hope they will keep conducting more such workshops.

Pradeep Rastogi

(Aarohi Bal Sansar, Pyura, Ramgarh, Dist. Nainital, Uttarakhand)

(Translated from the feedback received by E-mail in Hindi)

It was a great experience to participate in the workshop. Each day's experiments and their basic concepts were explained very well. This science workshop will increase the children's interest in science and will help them in understanding basic concepts. In future, these experiments will be conducted by the school for the children. The school family expresses gratitude to Baren-ji and his entire team.

Ashish Pandey

Principal

D.S.S. Pal Nainital Public School

Ramgarh Road, Shyamkhet, Nainital district 263132

Thank you for a wonderful and informative workshop. We enjoyed and learnt a lot in a comfortable environment; the style and the knowledge of the presenters were amazing. Although some of activities are easy, the concepts behind them are complex. They were made very simple by Mahak Ma'am. We learnt a lot because we had opportunities to ask questions and talk about real life examples. All the models are quite handy and even the students can assemble them easily. So, when the school will reopen, I will use these models to explain my lessons as students can easily understand the concepts through these models.

Mahaveer Jain

(Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, Hurda)

The science workshop was really wonderful. Classification of the topics was very systematic and easy to understand. Models were explained one by one in proper order, going from easy to difficult. Models demonstrated were easy to assemble with the help of guidelines given. Video links were provided which can be shared with students also.

Material used to make all these projects is safe for students; many of these can be used again and again. Explanation of any topic is not sufficient. Learning with fun or leaning by doing is better for understanding and learning. Motivational sessions provided on a few days were also very useful for a teacher to be not only a tutor but a perfect teacher.

A big thank you to Baren sir and Mehak ma'am.

Vivekanand Vidya Vihar

Maral Sarovar, Khalghat, Dist. Khargone



The experiments were easy and interesting. All the experiments were nicely explained and related to real life examples. Discussions were relevant to the topic. The sessions on 'Integral Education' and 'Science and Values' were enriching. All the sessions were nicely planned. We got a chance to share, interact and discuss our queries and ideas with facilitators from various regions of the country.

We enjoyed exploring with the models and trying out different ways to achieve the same goal under the guidance of Mahak ma'am and Baren sir. The models provided are of very good quality and they will be really useful for the students to understand multiple aspects and concepts of science. Session conducted by Dr. Bijlani was truly inspiring. The questions asked by Baren Sir after each experiment, inspired us to go deeper into the concepts, which was enriching.

It was a great opportunity for all of us to be a part of such a workshop. The experiments conducted have a practical utility, which in turn will help bring in the element of curiosity in the class. The workshop was very well planned and executed. An important learning which came along in this workshop was that the experiments can be conducted with things around us and no expensive equipment is required.

Matrikiran High School, Gurugram

We learnt forty-five simple experiments which can be used in the school. We learnt making simple science models with easily available materials. In this pandemic condition due to Covid-19, this science workshop gave us new hope and experience. We also participated in the program conducted by Bijlani sir and Aparna Roy ma'am to understand and appreciate mind capacities and science values.

Sri Shrihari R. Kulkarni

The Head Master

Sri Aurobindo Vidyamandir, Yalavatti, Karnataka

We would like to express our special gratitude to "Sri Aurobindo Ashram" as well as our mentor brother Mr. Baren and sister Ms. Mahak Hira who gave us the golden opportunity to learn as to how we can create interest in the students in science by "learning by doing". This wonderful workshop also helped us to address some practical issues, challenges, problems and doubts. We came to know about so many new things, which will help us to implement NEP-2020 recommendations. We look forward to attend such workshops in future also.

D.K. Gupta, Principal

Jaiprakash Chaubisa & Surendra Singh Chouhan, Teachers

Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalyaya

Rishabhdev, Dist. Udaipur (Rajasthan)

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*If you are associated with a school, and would like to participate in such a workshop,
please send an e-mail to Mr. Baren Roul on barenmbk@gmail.com*
.....

In science, the best is vastly more important than the next best.

Philip Handler

A man's mind stretched by a new idea can never go back to its original dimensions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale return of conjectures out of such a trifling investment of facts.

Mark Twain

notice board

Contact Us

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To get included in our mailing list for our free on-line quarterly magazine in Hindi, *Sri Aravind Karmadhara*, please send an e-mail to sakarndhara@gmail.com

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We Love to Hear from You

Please send your feedback to callbeyond@arobindoonline.in

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