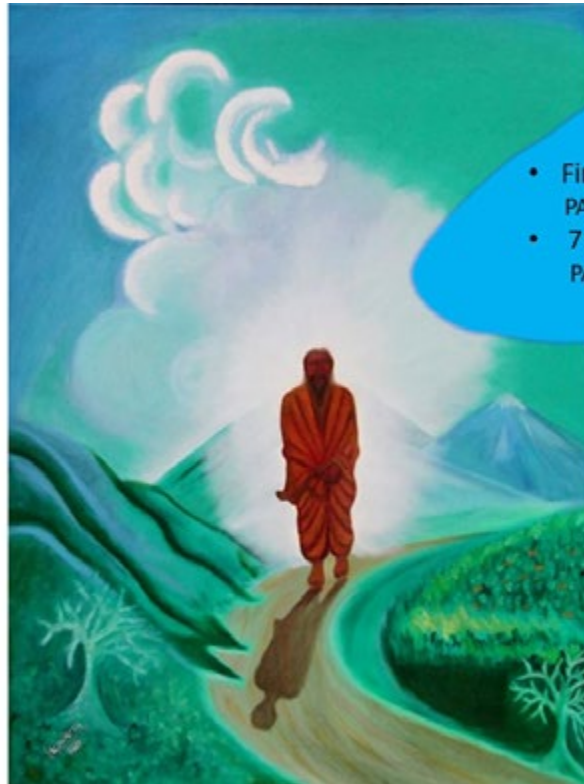


The Call Beyond

Volume 42 // No. 6 // 15 June 2017



- Finding Meaning in Life
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*Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart that heeds;
The doors of light are sealed to common mind,
And earth's needs nail to earth the human mass,
Only in an uplifting hour of stress
Men answer to the touch of greater things:
Or, raised by some strong hand to breathe heaven-air...*

Sri Aurobindo
Savitri, Book 11, Canto 1, p. 689

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Is Life a Game?

An aimless life is always a miserable life. ... on the quality of your aim will depend the quality of your life. Your aim should be high and wide, generous and disinterested; this will make your life precious to yourself and to others.

THE MOTHER

That life is a game, is a cliché, but it does not say much. A game may be taken lightly or seriously. The outcome of a game may depend on effort or on chance. Winning or losing a game may or may not matter. What type of a game is life?

If life is taken too lightly, it may be wasted. If it is taken too seriously, it may become unbearable. Therefore, wisdom lies in moderation.

The outcome of life depends both on effort and on chance. Chance we cannot control. Therefore, wisdom lies in focusing on effort. But what should the effort focus on? That depends on what outcome we want. Do we want material progress? Are we interested in intellectual satisfaction? Or is our aim spiritual growth? Any of these is at the expense of the other two. Selection should be based on knowing which outcome would lead to fulfillment, that is, the feeling that 'I have everything'. The knowledge is available, but we find it difficult to apply it because the knowledge is based on somebody else's experience. Knowledge can be applied only if it becomes a part of our own experience. Gaining experience is a step-wise process. One cannot experience the summit without climbing. Material progress is the first floor. It leaves us wanting more, and can keep us busy forever. Intellectual satisfaction is the second floor. It fails to satiate, but one can always find more to explore. Spiritual progress is the third floor. It promises the feeling that 'I have everything'. This experience confirms the knowledge we already had. Now we are ready to apply it. But getting to the stage of applying it comes the hard way. Few are those who learn it even the hard way. That is why they continue to suffer. The solution lies in willingness to revise the aim of life.

Does winning or losing the game of life matter? Yes, it does matter because the loser is condemned to repeat it. He is condemned to repeat not only the game, but also the suffering.

Yes, life is a game. It is a game with multiple score boards. Victory depends on choosing the right score board.

Life is a puzzle, a riddle, a test, a mystery, a game—whatever challenge you wish to compare it to.

— *RICHELLE E. GOODRICH*

First posted as a blog on 10 April 2017. Link: <http://www.speakingtree.in/blog/is-life-a-game-663513>. Also printed in *The Speaking Tree* on 23 April 2017.

See also the related Article 'One Question, Many Answers' (p. 4) and the piece 'Meagre Means, Mega Missions' (p. 14)

One Question, Many Answers

Does life have a meaning? If so, what is it? Are we here on earth by accident, or by design and with a purpose? These are questions that disturb only a few. For the rest, either these questions do not exist at all, or come up sporadically, provide some intellectual entertainment, and then vanish till the next fit of curiosity (see the poem 'Favourites of Nature' on page 13). But Will Durant asked this question seriously in 1930.



Who was Will Durant?

Will Durant (5 November 1885 – 7 November 1981) was an American writer, thinker and India lover. He is best known for his 11 volumes of 'The Story of Civilization', written in collaboration with his wife, Ariel Durant, and published between 1935 and 1975. Around 1930, he came to India to collect some material for 'The Story of Civilization'. But he was so taken aback by the contrast between the past glory and the 'present' misery of India, that he interrupted the work on his magnum opus to write a small book, 'The Case for India', which was published in 1931. A PDF of the book can now be downloaded free from the internet, courtesy Strand Book Stall, Mumbai.

In the autumn of 1930, Will Durant was outside his home in Lake Hill, New York, raking leaves. He was approached by a well-dressed man who told him in a quiet tone that he was going to kill himself unless the philosopher could give him a valid reason not to. That being not the time for a polished philosophic answer, Durant did his best to give the man many reasons for continuing to live. Haunted by the encounter, Durant wrote a letter to 100 luminaries in the arts, politics, religion and sciences, asking them to respond not only to the fundamental question of life's meaning but also to relate how they found meaning, purpose and fulfillment in their own lives. Durant turned their answers and his own ideas on the topic into a book titled 'On the Meaning of Life', which was published in 1932.

Will Durant's letter

"Dear _____:

"Will you interrupt your work for a moment and play the game of philosophy with me?

"I am attempting to face a question which our generation, perhaps more than any, seems always ready to ask and never able to answer -- **What is the meaning or worth of human life?** Heretofore this question has been dealt with chiefly by theorists, from Ikhnaton and Lao-tse to Bergson and Spengler. The result has been a kind of intellectual suicide: thought, by its very development, seems to have destroyed the value and significance of life. **The growth and spread of knowledge, for which so many idealists and reformers prayed, has resulted in a disillusionment which has almost broken the spirit of our race.**

“**Astronomers** have told us that human affairs constitute but a moment in the trajectory of a star; **geologists** have told us that civilization is but a precarious interlude between ice ages; **biologists** have told us that all life is war, a struggle for existence among individuals, groups, nations, alliances, and species; **historians** have told us that ‘progress’ is a delusion, whose glory ends in inevitable decay; **psychologists** have told us that the will and the self are the helpless instruments of heredity and environment, and that the once incorruptible soul is but a transient incandescence of the brain. The Industrial Revolution has destroyed the home, and the discovery of contraceptives is destroying the family, the old morality, and perhaps (through the sterility of the intelligent) the race. **Love** is analyzed into a physical congestion, and **marriage** becomes a temporary physiological convenience slightly superior to promiscuity. **Democracy** has degenerated into such corruption as only Milo’s Rome knew; and **our youthful dreams** of a socialist Utopia disappear as we see, day after day, the inexhaustible acquisitiveness of men. **Every invention strengthens the strong and weakens the weak**; every new mechanism displaces men, and multiplies the horror of war. **God**, who was once the consolation of our brief life, and our refuge in bereavement and suffering, has apparently vanished from the scene; no telescope, no microscope discovers him. Life has become, in that total perspective which is philosophy, a fitful pullulation of human insects on the earth, a planetary eczema that may soon be cured; nothing is certain in it except defeat and death -- a sleep from which, it seems, there is no awakening.

“We are driven to conclude that **the greatest mistake in human history was the discovery of ‘truth.’** It has not made us free, except from delusions that comforted us and restraints that preserved us. It has not made us happy, for truth is not beautiful, and did not deserve to be so passionately chased. As we look on it now we wonder why we hurried so to find it. For it has taken from us every reason for existence except the moment’s pleasure and tomorrow’s trivial hope.

“**This is the pass to which science and philosophy have brought us.** I, who have loved philosophy for many years, now turn back to life itself, and ask you, as one who has lived as well as thought, to help me understand. Perhaps the verdict of those who have lived is different from that of those who have merely thought. **Spare me a moment to tell me what meaning life has for you, what keeps you going, what help -- if any -- religion gives you, what are the sources of your inspiration and your energy, what is the goal or motive-force of your toil, where you find your consolations and your happiness, where, in the last resort, your treasure lies.** Write briefly if you must; write at length and at leisure if you possibly can; for every word from you will be precious to me.

“Sincerely yours,

Will Durant”

Editor’s comment:

*The letter reflects the spirit of the early twentieth century Western Europe and North America. Here is a scholar, a thinker, lamenting the scientific developments of the decades preceding this letter and their social consequences. Much was expected from science in terms of eliminating ignorance, misery and suffering. But none of these hopes were fulfilled; if anything, the traditional solace that came from religion and belief in God became unfashionable because it seemed irrational, superstitious and outdated to a generation overwhelmed by the achievements of science in the material sphere. **It is because of the failure of science to wipe out the problems of human existence that Will Durant calls the discovery of ‘truth’ the greatest mistake in human history – the ‘truth’ here refers to the truths discovered by science.***

Disillusioned by science, he almost feels the ignorance of the past when people could lean on religion and take refuge in God was better than the knowledge that science has given us. It is not the knowledge of science alone but all mental knowledge suffers from this inadequacy. It cannot solve the basic problems of injustice, misery and suffering that characterize human existence, because such knowledge leaves the level of consciousness untouched. The poet philosopher Iqbal echoed these sentiments in a couplet: *Teree nigaah mein hain tamaam mere guzashtaa ruzoshab/mujhko khabar na thee ki hai ilm nakhil beratab* (You have a total view of the days and nights of my past, I did not know that knowledge is a tree without sap). The poet is telling God that at least He knew how Iqbal had spent his years studying day and night; it is rather late that the poet has discovered how sterile all his knowledge is. It is a sort of complaint that knowing everything, why God let him spend years poring over books; He could have told the poet that instead of accumulating knowledge he better turn to something higher than mental knowledge.

ARE MY OPINIONS REALLY MINE?

... ask yourself why you have this opinion ... The answer will almost invariably be ...

- Because it is the opinion prevalent in your environment, because it is considered good form to have it and therefore saves you from as many clashes, frictions, criticisms as possible.

- Or because this was the opinion of your father or mother, the opinion which moulded your childhood.

- Or else because this opinion is the normal outcome of the education, religious or otherwise, you received in your youth. **This thought is not your own thought.** ...

... we are dominated by a collective suggestion which is so powerful, so overwhelming, that very few succeed in avoiding it altogether. ...

We are products determined by all our past history, impelled by the blind and arbitrary will of our contemporaries.

– THE MOTHER

(Excerpted from ‘On Thought’, a talk given on 15 December 1911. In: *Words of Long Ago*, Fourth edition, 1994, p.26)

The Replies that Will Durant got

Here are some excerpts from the replies that Will Durant got in response to his letter.

H.L. Mencken, American journalist, satirist, cultural critic and scholar:

“What the **meaning of human life** may be I don’t know: **I incline to suspect that it has none.** All I know about it is that, to me at least, it is very amusing while it lasts. Even its troubles, indeed, can be amusing. Moreover, they tend to foster the human qualities that I admire most -- courage and its analogues. **The noblest man, I think, is that one who fights God, and triumphs over Him.** I have had little of this to do. When I die I shall be content to vanish into nothingness. No show, however good, could conceivably be good forever.”

Editor's comment:

This is an answer typical of the age and place. Highly enamoured of science and its truths, there was a tendency to believe that man, with the help of science, could control and conquer God (or Nature, a word more acceptable than God). Science was seen as an enterprise that would unravel all the secrets of nature, and use the knowledge so acquired for controlling nature so that man could live in greater comfort. Within a century, the world has realized how short-sighted this vision was. Man (actually, only a small section of humanity) did succeed in living in greater comfort, but working against nature proved disastrous for the planet because it exhausted natural resources at a rate much faster than that at which they could be replenished.

*Conquering God is a mission that Mencken reserves for only the 'noblest'. For the rest, he is 'inclined to suspect' that there is **no meaning to life**. Accordingly, speaking for himself, he says that he finds life amusing while it lasts, and that he will be quite content to vanish into nothingness. In short, we are born, we live, we enjoy, and we die – why do we have to look for a deeper meaning in human life?*

Sinclair Lewis, American novelist, short-story writer, and playwright:

“It is, I think, an error to believe that there is any need of religion to make life seem worth living...I know **several young people** who have been reared entirely without thought of churches, of formal theology, or any other aspect of religion, who **have learned ethics not as a divine commandment but as a matter of social convenience**. They seem to me quite as happy, quite as filled with purpose and with eagerness about life as any one trained to pass all his troubles on to the Lord, or the Lord's local agent, the pastor”.

Editor's comment:

*Living an **ethically sound life based on rationality** is quite adequate to fill life with a purpose, according to Sinclair Lewis. He finds religion quite redundant. Rationality rendering religion redundant was the rage with intellectuals of the western world a hundred years ago. Ethics based on rationality, termed 'The Religion of Humanity' by Sri Aurobindo, was the finest product of the age of reason. But as he had foreseen, it proved inadequate to wipe out the problems of human existence, because it did not demand shifting the consciousness to a level distinctly higher than the mental. The result was that when an ego-driven rational person tries to live an ethically sound life, he still remains basically selfish, and in the society the strong continue to flourish at the expense of the weak. Religion has the potential of taking the consciousness to a subjective supra-rational level; spirituality does it much better than religion.*

Charles Beard, American historian:

“When we analyze ourselves we find conflicting motives. We have moments of shivering selfishness, when we think only of our personal gain. And we have moments of exaltation when we feel the thrill of the prodigious and hear the call to high action. ...

“For myself I may say that as I look over the grand drama of history, I find (or seem to find) amid the apparent chaos and tragedy, **evidence of law and plan and immense achievement of the human spirit** in spite of disasters. I am convinced that the world is not a mere bog in which men and women trample themselves in the mire and die. Something magnificent is taking place here amid the cruelties and tragedies, and the supreme challenge to intelligence is that of making the noblest and best in our curious heritage prevail.

If there was no grand design in the beginning of the universe, fragments of one are evident and mankind can complete the picture. A knowledge of the good life is our certain philosophic heritage, and technology has given us a power over nature which enables us to provide the conditions of the good life for all the earth's multitudes. That seems to me to be the most engaging possibility of the drama, and faith in its potentialities keeps me working at it even in the worst hours of disillusionment. The good life -- an end in itself to be loved and enjoyed; and intelligent labor directed to the task of making the good life prevail. There is the little philosophy, the circle of thought, within which I keep my little mill turning”.

Editor's comment:

Charles Beard does talk of a grand design on which the universe is founded, and man's role in completing the picture. But whose grand design it is, and who created the universe, are questions that it was fashionable to keep aside to avoid bringing God into the picture. Secondly, he does not have in mind man's role in accelerating the rise in the average level of human consciousness as man's contribution to finishing the grand design, as visualized by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Rather, Beard views man's contribution in terms of technology providing a good life to the multitudes on earth, the good life apparently meaning a physically comfortable life. Thus, to him the meaning of human life is to provide finishing touches to the comfortable life that is the design behind the creation of the world, and making a technological contribution to it would be the purpose of the life of an individual. A very material route to a material goal is, to him, the purpose of life.

Will Durant's answer to his own question:

“Let me confess at once that I cannot answer, in any absolute or metaphysical sense, [the] question as to the meaning of life. I suspect that there is some ultimate significance to everything, though I know that our little minds will never fathom it. For the meaning of anything must lie in its relation to some whole of which it is a part; and how could any fragment or moment of life, like you or me, pretend to rise out of its individual cell and survey or understand the entirety of things? . . .

“**‘Be a whole or join a whole,’ said Goethe.** If we think of ourselves as part of a living (no merely theoretical) group, we shall find life a little fuller, perhaps even more significant. For **to give life a meaning one must have a purpose larger than one's self, and more enduring than one's life.**

“...we can say of any life in particular that its meaning lies in its relation to something larger than itself. Hence the greater fullness of the married and parental, as compared with the celibate and sterile, life; a man feels significant in proportion as he contributes, physically or mentally, to the entity of which he acknowledges himself a part. We who are too superior to belong to groups, who are too wise to marry or too clever to have children, find life empty and vain, and wonder has it any meaning. ...

“Where, in the last resort, does my treasure lie? -- in everything. A man should have many irons in the fire; **he should not let his happiness be bound up entirely with his children, or his fame, or his prosperity, or even his health;** but he should be able to find nourishment for his content in any one of these, even if all the rest are taken away. My last resort, I think, would be Nature herself; short of all other gifts and goods, I should find, I hope, sufficient courage for existence in any mood of field and sky, or, shorn of sight, in some concourse of sweet sounds, or some poet's memory of a day that smiled. All in all, experience is a marvelously rich panorama, from which any sense should be able to draw sustenance for living.”

Editor's comment:

Will Durant has stretched his mind to the utmost, and when one does so, one starts transcending it. And, that is what is reflected in his finding meaning in life in something larger than oneself. While he does not dismiss happiness as the motive behind the meaning one looks for in life, he is groping for some way of making happiness independent of external circumstances such as family, fame, wealth or even health, because any of these may be lost at any moment. Lasting joy and peace can come only from That which is everlasting. Therefore, the purpose of life is to move in the direction that will lead to identification with the Divine.

*Thus, we find in Will Durant's answer a return to something deeper and higher than the rational mind as the basis of finding meaning in life. As Sri Aurobindo says in the first paragraph of 'The Life Divine', "**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 skepticism and returns after every banishment**, – is also the highest that his thought can envisage. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, – God, Light, Freedom, Immortality". Will Durant shows in his answer the tendency to return to "the earliest preoccupation of man" after the skepticism and banishment that characterized the age of reason in the West. Today that tendency is far more pronounced, with many more thinkers in the West talking more emphatically and clearly about spiritual growth, or growth of consciousness being the purpose of human life.*

SOME GEMS ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

... the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realization of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth.

SRI AUROBINDO, In: 'The Life Divine', SABCL edition, p. 4

Truth of being must govern truth of life; it cannot be that the two have no relation or interdependence. The highest significance of life to us, the fundamental truth of existence, must be also the accepted meaning of our own living, our aim, our ideal.

SRI AUROBINDO, In: 'The Life Divine', SABCL edition, p. 667

It is not a rationalisation but a supramentalisation, not a moralising but a spiritualising of Life that is the object of the Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO, In: 'The Synthesis of Yoga', SABCL edition, p. 165

*A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine.*

SRI AUROBINDO, In: 'Savitri', SABCL edition, p. 67

... to feel love and oneness is to live

SRI AUROBINDO, In: 'Savitri', SABCL edition, p. 724

We express our gratitude to Shri Nirankar Agarwal for providing the letter by Will Durant to his contemporaries, and suggesting that it could form the basis of a good article on the meaning of life.

See also the related Editorial, 'Is Life a Game' (p. 3) and the piece 'Meagre Means, Mega Missions' (p.14)

hundred years ago

The Miraculous Touch of the Divine*

The collection Prayers and Meditations consists of extracts from the Mother's spiritual diaries. Most of them are from the period 1912 to 1917



Each time that a heart leaps at the touch of Thy divine breath, a little more beauty seems to be born upon the Earth, the air is embalmed with a sweet perfume, all becomes more friendly.

How great is Thy power, O Lord of all existences, that an atom of Thy joy is sufficient to efface so much darkness, so many sorrows and a single ray of Thy glory can light up thus a dullest pebble, illumine the blackest consciousness!

Thou hast heaped Thy favours upon me, Thou hast unveiled to me many secrets, Thou hast made me taste many unexpected and un hoped for joys, but no grace of Thine can be equal to this Thou grantest to me when a heart leaps at the touch of Thy divine breath.

At these blessed hours all earth sings hymn of gladness, the grasses shudder with pleasure, the air is vibrant with light, the trees lift towards heaven their most ardent prayer, the chant of the birds becomes a canticle, the waves of the sea billow with love, the smile of children tells of the infinite and the souls of

men appear in their eyes.

Tell me, wilt Thou grant me the marvellous power to give birth to this dawn in expectant hearts, to awaken the consciousness of men to Thy sublime presence, and in this bare and sorrowful world awaken a little of Thy true Paradise? What happiness, what riches, what terrestrial powers can equal this wonderful gift!

O Lord, never have I implored Thee in vain, for that which speaks to Thee is Thyself in me.

Drop by drop Thou allowest to fall in a fertilising rain the living and redeeming flame of Thy almighty love. When these drops of eternal light descend softly in our world of obscure ignorance, one would say a rain upon earth of golden stars one by one from a sombre firmament.

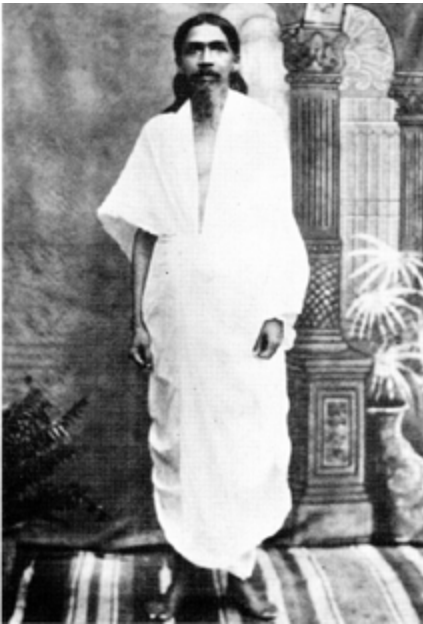
All kneels in mute devotion before this ever-renewed miracle.

THE MOTHER (In *Prayers and Meditations*, prayer dated 31 March, 1917)

**Title given by the editor*

The Synthesis of Yoga

THE PLANES OF OUR EXISTENCE



The union of the Purusha in us with the highest self is not possible by dwelling on the present material plane of our being, because there the divine is hidden by the workings of Prakriti and the individual soul emerging from her involution of spirit in matter, subject in all its activities to its entangling in the material and vital instruments is unable to experience the divine freedom. Therefore we have to speak of the spiritual planes of the mental being; for if these did not exist, the liberation of the embodied being would have been impossible on earth.

The ordinary yoga of knowledge recognizes multiple planes of existence, but disregards them as nonessential to liberation. But since we accept world-existence, then all planes must be possessed for the Divine in order for self-knowledge to be complete and transform our ordinary poise of mind, life and body.

But first we must understand what we mean by planes of consciousness, planes of existence. We mean a general settled poise or world of relations between Purusha and Prakriti, between the Soul and Nature. The nature of each plane is determined by the way Prakriti deals with existence, conscious-force and delight (sat-chit-ananda) on that level. In each plane these are more or less developed or veiled.

The soul is living on a material plane of existence in which matter is still the chief determinant of its relations to Nature, and its consciousness being limited by Matter cannot be an entirely self-possessing consciousness. These limitations of his power, knowledge, life, delight of existence are the whole cause of man's dissatisfaction with himself and the universe. There must be planes of his own being by ascending to which he can transcend them, or higher beings from which he can receive knowledge, powers, joys, a growth of his being otherwise impossible. All these things, the ancient knowledge asserts, exist, – other worlds, higher planes, the possibility of communication, ascension, of growth by contact with and influence from that which is above him in the present scale of his realised being.

As there is a poise of the relations of Purusha with Prakriti in which Matter is the first determinant, a world of material existence, so there is another just above it in which Life-force is the first determinant. In this world life determines form, which is much more free, fluid and variable than in the material world. Desire and the satisfaction of impulse are the first law of this world of sheer vital existence and so it may be called the desire-world. Intense enjoyment and intense sufferings are possible here. Life on earth is said to be the result of the pressure of this life-world on the material, unconscious existence of the physical universe. Beings and influences from this plane constantly act on the life-part in us. Relation with these beings occupies much of magic, occultism, and superstition. We are not aware of this plane because we live in the physical body, the physical vitality and the physical mind.

Beyond this life-plane there is a mental plane in which mind is the first determinant. Here mind is the psychical and the intellectual being, free to satisfy and fulfil itself in a way hardly conceivable to our body-bound and life-bound mentality. Purusha is a pure mental being here. This world of mental existence also is constantly acting upon us and our world, has its powers and its beings, is related to us through our mental body.

The highest worlds are supramental; they belong to the principle of supermind, the free, spiritual or divine intelligence and to the triple spiritual principle of Sachchidananda. Our conscious spiritual being and our intuitive mind awaken in us as a result of the pressure of these highest worlds on the mental being in life and body. But this casual body is little developed in majority of men and to live in it or to ascend to the supramental planes is the most difficult thing of all for the human being. Contact with this body is usually done in the trance of Samadhi. But it can also be done consciously, through evolution of new capacities.

SRI AUROBINDO (In the *Arya*, Vol. 3, No. 11, 15 June 1917)

twenty five years ago

The Three 'Madnesses' of Sri Aurobindo

(From a letter to Mrinalini Devi)*

I have three madnesses. Firstly, it is my firm faith that whatever virtue, talent, higher education, knowledge and wealth God has given me belong to Him. I have the right to spend only as much as is needed for the maintenance of the family and on what is absolutely necessary. Whatever remains should be returned to the Divine.

The second madness has recently taken hold of me; it is this: by whatever means I must get the direct realization of God... If the Divine is there, then there must be a way to experience His existence, to realise His presence; however hard be the path I have taken a firm resolution to follow it.

The third madness is this: Whereas others regard the country as an inert object and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountain and the rivers, I know my country as the Mother, I worship it and adore it as the Mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on its mother's breast prepares to drink her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to rescue his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not physical strength, I am not going to fight with a sword or with a gun, but with the power of knowledge... This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow, God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission.

Reproduced from *The Call Beyond*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1992, p. 14

*Mrinalini Devi was Sri Aurobindo's wife

Favourites of Nature

PRAKRITI

... they find life quite all right as it is and do not care to know if it has a reason or a purpose. ... Such people you must never try to 'convert': it would be a serious blunder. ... They are not ready for an inner life. But they are Nature's favourites; they have a very intimate alliance with her and this achievement must not be uselessly disturbed.

THE MOTHER (in 'Four Austerities and Four Liberations')

*They live and they die,
They suffer and they enjoy,
When they suffer, they cry
Why me, where is God?
When they enjoy, they cry
Why not me? There is a God.
Thus they pass their life,
Seeing not much beyond husband and wife,
Parents, well, they gave us birth and food,
Kids, they say, are an interlude.
The meaning behind it all,
The purpose why they came here at all,
Are questions that they leave,
With relief and pleasure for others to deal,
These others they may call wise,
Or they may dismiss them as otherwise.
They laugh and they cry,
They suffer and they enjoy,
They live and they die,
But do not ask why.
Favourites of nature are they, says the Mother,
Neither disturb them nor interfere.*



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 the readers are welcome, and may be printed at the editor's discretion after editorial revision.

Seven Steps to Happiness

1. Think less, Feel more
2. Frown less, Smile more
3. Talk less, Listen more
4. Judge less, Accept more
5. Watch less, Do more
6. Complain less, Appreciate more
7. Fear less, Love more

– Anonymous

Meagre Means, Mega Missions

This is the story of Sunil, 53, who looked just 35. His job: to cook for Om Swami, a monk, on a meagre salary. One day Sunil asked for the Swami's permission to bring his son to him for a short while to get his blessings. Swami ji said yes, and Sunil appeared at the door the next day with his son. The son looked 40, a little too old to be Sunil's son, and did not seem to be entirely 'normal'. But Swami ji blessed him, and 'father and son' went back home. Later, Swami ji's curiosity brought forth from Sunil the story of his life.

Sunil had two biological children, a son and a daughter. Later, he adopted a 4-year old girl whose mother, a maid, died of cancer. His adopted daughter was now quite grown up, and an artist.

About 25 years ago, Sunil was staying and working in a guest house. One day he went to a sweetshop to get samosas for a guest. Outside the sweetshop was a poor boy. Seeing Sunil take interest in the boy, the owner of the sweetshop said in a rather vexed tone that this boy had been hanging around for 3 days. The first day he had given him something to eat, but he could not feed him every day, he said. Moreover, said the sweet seller, "He stinks. He is not good for my business". Sunil bought enough stuff to feed the boy well. He asked the boy about his home, his parents, etc. but drew a blank. The boy could only mumble something, and wailed a lot (the boy apparently was autistic). Sunil took the boy with him to his room in the guest house. He also got a scolding for taking so long to get the samosas. Then he gave the boy a bath, changed his clothes, and got the permission to keep him in the guest house. Sunil tried to unite the boy with his parents, but could not locate them. Sunil named the boy Sandesh (literally, message: he considered the boy to be a message from God). With time, the boy learnt to have a bath independently, and could water the plants and sweep the paths clean. Three years later, Sandesh's parents turned up. When they saw how much Sandesh had changed, they wept, and told Sunil that they had never looked after him so well. Sunil was ready to send Sandesh back with them, but Sandesh did not want to go. That is how Sandesh was still with him, and Sunil had brought him to be blessed by Swami ji.

The purpose of life is spiritual growth, or growth of consciousness, and life is full of opportunities to address the purpose of life. Yes, life provides opportunities, but we have to use them. The same boy was for the owner of the sweetshop a nuisance, and for Sunil a "message from God". The owner of the sweetshop threw away the opportunity knocking at his door for three days. Sunil used the same opportunity as soon as he saw it. Sunil probably did not know terms such as 'spiritual growth', or 'growth of consciousness'. He was also probably not troubled by the question what the purpose of life is and how it can be addressed. But the process does not depend on these intellectual excursions. Sunil grew spiritually through the way he lived, specially through the two children he adopted. He fulfilled the purpose of his life. And, as a fringe benefit, he slowed down his aging. That is why at 53 he looked only 35.

(Based on an e-mail received from Om Swami. Om Swami is a non-traditional monk, and is the author of seven books, the first of which was *If Truth Be Told: A Monk's Memoir*, published in 2014.)

See also the related Editorial, 'Is Life a Game' (p. 3) and the Article, 'One Question, Many Answers' (p.4)

may i help you

In this column, we try to answer three types of questions from the readers: 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 sending the question is kept confidential if the question is about a sensitive issue. The questions may be sent to callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in

'M' wants to know:

How can the mind be kept calm?

The mind, by its very nature is restless. As Sri Krishna concedes, "without doubt, the mind is restless" (The Gita, 6:35), and then says that "it may be controlled by abhyasa (constant practice) and vairagya (non-attachment)". The practice may be during meditation, or otherwise. The other important necessity is non-attachment to desires, possessions, relationships, power, prestige, success, wealth, and even to work and good health: in short, to just about everything that cannot last. Not easy, and that is why keeping the mind calm is not easy. It is even more difficult if living an active worldly life, and be surrounded by deadlines, obligations, temptations, conflicts and responsibilities. The key is to be just surrounded by them but not get immersed in them. A beautiful analogy was given by the poet, Oliver Goldsmith, in his poem 'The Village Preacher'. There is a preacher living a simple life in the village. He has so many visitors, each coming to share with him his sorrows. The preacher feels their sorrows, counsels them without judging them, but still remains calm because "all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven". After this serious explanation for his remaining calm, comes this analogy to explain how he stayed calm in spite of listening to so many tales of all types of woes that fill the lives of lesser mortals:

As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,

Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,

Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,

Eternal sunshine settles on the head.



appreciations

A Letter to Tara Didi

Respected Tara Di,

We appreciate and are thankful for all the support and guidance provided by Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch for the smooth execution of our Employability Linked Skill Development Training Program for girls from underprivileged families.

The program was in two phases. The first phase was started in April 2016 with 35 girls out of whom 14 are working, 8 are going to regular colleges and the rest are doing professional courses while earning and learning. The second phase was started in September 2016 with 32 girls out of whom 20 are working, 5 of them are preparing for government exams and 7 of them are doing professional courses. All of them are performing their duties exceptionally well in their respective fields, growing and trying to stabilize their families. This would have not been possible without your support and blessings.

We are glad to inform you that the positive surroundings and peaceful ambience of the Ashram have given the girls enormous learning. Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's blessings and the presence of devotees of the ashram, by being role models, has opened the hearts of our girls to an extent wherein they have imbibed the lessons of life effortlessly. We are thankful to the faculty for regularly volunteering for the classes which have added a touch of grace in inspiring the children.

As a special mention, teachings based on Bijlani Sir's Kavya story, and his classes on other topics have added great values in a way that not only our girls but their parents and their surroundings have been greatly impacted towards the change which was earlier hard for them to understand or to relate to.

Programs like the Clean Mind, Pom-pom (Recycling), classes on usage of PayTM (During Demonetization), Rozgar connect and Ayurveda and yogic style of living have added a lot of awareness. As always, we are looking forward to the same level of support from the Ashram team in the years to come.

Thank you!

Regards

Neha Chaudhary

Project Manager

Shri Ratanlal Foundation

(in a letter received on 26 April 2017)

Feedback from a group led by Karen Hamdon & Lawrence Dombro from Canada (March-April 2017)

Incredible stay. The satsang experience (on 2 April 2017) in the meditation hall was thought provoking and a great experience. Ideas presented in a clear way, we can continue to ponder and explore. Thank you!

Brenna & Linda McLennan

I am privileged to have spent time here at this ashram and to have heard Dr. Bijlani speak. Thank you for your generous sharing of knowledge and thank to all here for welcoming us here during our time in Delhi.

Namaste!

Kari Clarke

Feedback from a group from South Africa led by Ireen Branders (28 March – 2 April 2017)

Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge with us all. We are students of the divine on this good earth and you are an inspirational teacher. I leave the ashram feeling energized and inspired, I have loved staying here. Keep spreading your loving message. The purpose of life is to grow in consciousness.

Catherine Heins

In every moment of life perceived to be positive or negative, the opportunity for growth of the spirit exists, making all moments positive. The simple awareness and belief in this has beautified the way in which I interact with the physical world.

I have experienced a significant shift in my awareness of self, my place in the world and the divine within. My place in the world is the spirit of the universe within me.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram has been an amazing experience leaving me wanting, almost needing, to learn more. I have a copy of *The Life Divine* and have already begun the manifestation of my return to India for future enlightenment.

Namaste

Vaughn Richard du Preez

My journey to India can most certainly be described as self-discovery. For as long as I can remember I have had this need to discover, understand and know! My thinking and my ways have always been different, and after coming here, being with you, being with other like-minded people I know that I am on the right path to become a mystic. The journey has and always been of love for me. I have experienced such pain, such loss at a very young age which has made my path easier yet difficult at the same time. Truth is that, that is the beauty of life which has good and bad, and in understanding it there is a lesson, a lesson of love. I am thankful for all the journey and the understanding that the divine lives within me. Every day is a blessing and what we choose is always what we manifest and what we manifest is of the divine. I know that I will return here to learn more as my path tells me that my destiny is to share the story, share the love. I want to thank you for saying the truth, when the student is ready a teacher will appear. You have lifted me to a new level of love, understanding and peace. Bless you and the work you do.

Namaste

Cerise Maartens

Thank you so much for sharing all this knowledge. I am feeling very grateful. A lot of new information, a lot to process. Re-reading the notes I took will put it all into place. The drawings on the board helped me every time to understand more. I am looking forward to reading the books I bought. Meeting you and having the honour to join the lectures was a real blessing.

Lots of Gratitude.

Natalie Lambert

My expectations of the ashram were fulfilled as I received a wonderful feeling of love and light. We all want to receive light from the divine to become a loving and giving person to all creatures. I have enjoyed my time at the ashram and have learnt so much. I take away with me wisdom and joy to pass on in our home country and to teach others and for myself to learn and grow to reach a higher level of consciousness.

Alison Van Wyk

I think this whole experience has been absolutely amazing. I loved that you said 'everything can work'. Everything around me is simple and joyful. The gardens are peaceful and healing. The people I have spoken in the ashram have truly added so much value to my journey of discovering myself. Thank you Dr. Ramesh, I am filled with love and light.

Paige Cassidy

A very peaceful, informative and enlightening experience. Dr. Ramesh is a fountain of knowledge and I consider myself privileged to have been able to hear his words of wisdom.

Jenny Walters

Sometimes in life one needs a little light to brighten the winding road ahead. Your talk inspired me to see the good and amend the bad, to change my attitude towards the crazy world we live in and in doing so, live a more peaceful life!

Regards

Yael Bergh

I have definitely gained more knowledge on 'The Purpose of Life' and feel I have the ground to explore more through reading and listening. I loved the whole experience of the ashram. Thank you for your time and sharing your boundless knowledge with us. An exceptional journey I will never forget!

Thank you, Love and Light,

Best Regards

Sandra Jung

Feedback on Orientation to Integral Yoga, 22 & 23 April 2017

I have been studying and listening about Spirituality, Yoga and Meditation for last few years. But many confusions were aroused which got cleared very beautifully in the Integral Yoga camp.

Satya Prakash Agarwal

Very effective program. The sessions on Asanas and Pranayams were enjoyable and relaxing. The discourses were lucid and contained a lot of clarity. I have much more clarity in my mind about the meaning of Yoga, about various Yoga schools and ways to grow in spiritual life. The concept of psychic being was explained brilliantly and in a very simple way. The diagram, 'Journey of Life' so beautifully captures the mechanism and process of spiritual growth. The Havan was conducted in a great natural setting and it was very uplifting and relaxing. Overall the program has achieved its objectives and is highly recommended to those who want to start on the spiritual path.

Navdeep Rinwa

Thank you so much for your hospitality and your time. It was a privilege. The session was so holistic in approach and touches all aspects of life and being. It works to enable and empower ourselves to start looking at life in a more positive way. A step forward.

Parul Sharma

Listening to your thoughts and teachings/learnings is always a wonderful uplifting experience to me. I hope I am able to retain, practice and teach my kids a bit or whole of the same. Thank you.

Saurabh Sharma

Both the days have been immensely wonderful to me, especially in terms of learning about spiritual growth. And most important, in solving the recent challenge that I was snowed under!

Naina Ghatak

Very good and open discussion on basic principles of Integral Yoga. Dr. Bijlani has incorporated the basic logic and analytical analysis into understanding the concepts. Musical breaks helped one to refresh.

Sanjeev Jain

Enlightening and relaxing. Sessions have made me spiritually more curious and will guide me to the purpose of my life.

Vinti Batra

There is more clarity about where I am. Also there is a level of comfort which I wish to get out of to be able to contribute more. Thank you for such sessions.

Arti Saha

The program 'The Purpose of Life' was an extension of my ongoing knowledge as a seeker. Whenever a question arises somehow, within a few days I get some answer. Thank you.

Akansha Jain

Very informative course. It has made me more curious about Integral Yoga and I intend to follow up by attending more sessions as well as reading the related literature.

Vandana Sethi

First of all I would like to thank Bijlani Sir for making me feel good as I was very tensed and depressed when I came here. The sessions helped a lot and I look forward to more of them.

Swati Dhankar

Thank you for the morning Satsang and the stress management session. These weekly visits to the ashram have helped me heal. Thank you.

R. Nithya

A Letter from Australia

Dear Dr. Ramesh,

Greetings to you from Melbourne. I pray this finds you and all at Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch well and in good spirits!

Here is your Contributor Bio Page on 1GOD.com

<http://1god.com/2017/05/03/interview-dr-ramesh-bijlani/>

And here is the little interview you and I did – it came out very well – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VR61zSCW95g>

Also, Derek from 1GOD will be publishing more of your material on the 1GOD platform soon.

Thank you for all your contributions towards a breakthrough in evolution and consciousness on our planet!

Thanks & Love!

Ben (Bowler)

Founder & Director, World Weavers

(in an e-mail dated 13 May 2017)

notice board

International Yoga Day, Wednesday, 21 June 2017

6.00 am	Yogasanas and Pranayamas	Samadhi Lawns
3.30 pm	Play: The Journey of Life	Hall of Joy
6.30 pm	An Offering of Devotional Songs on Yoga by Premsheela	Meditation Hall

Contact us

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