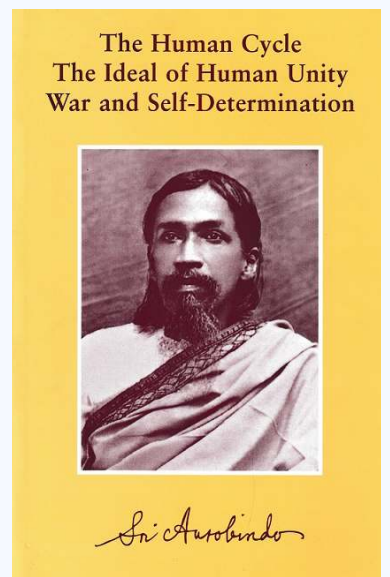
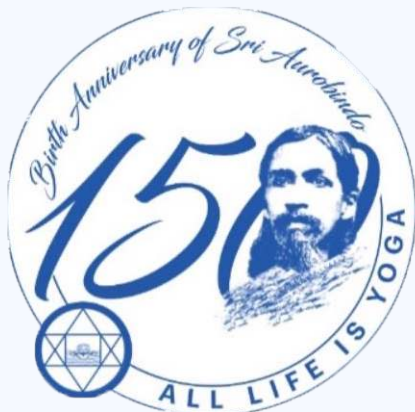




# The Call Beyond





## *Highlights*

*The Human Cycle... .. Page 5*

*Selections from 'The Human Cycle'... .. Page 14*

*Where Do We Stand?... .. Page 25*

*India as the Vishwa Guru... .. Page 39*



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# Contents

## Editorial

- *Celebrating 150 Years of Sri Aurobindo* . . . . . 4

## Book of the Month

- *The Human Cycle* . . . . . 5

## Words of the Master

- *Selections from 'The Human Cycle'* . . . . . 14

## Words of the Mother

- *Do Not Leave the Path* . . . . . 24

## Article

- *Where Do We Stand?* . . . . . 25

## Twenty-Five Years Ago

- *The Impossible Dream* . . . . . 33

## Magnet

- *Tehmi-Ben (1917-2004)* . . . . . 35

## May I Help You

- *India as the Vishwa Guru* . . . . . 39

## Appreciations

- *Feedback and Encouraging Words* . . . . . 40

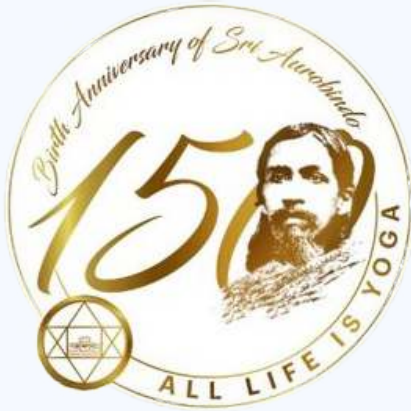
## Notice Board

- *Forthcoming Events* . . . . . 44
- *Contact us* . . . . . 45



## Celebrating 150 Years of Sri Aurobindo

(1872-2022)



Who was Sri Aurobindo? **A freedom fighter**, who shook the British Empire within five years? **A poet**, who could give poetic expression to whispers from the heavens? **A writer**, who would have honoured the Nobel Prize for Literature, if it had been conferred on him? **A linguist**, who raised the level of the English

language to that of Sanskrit, and deciphered the symbolism of the Veda? **A yogi**, who gave the world Integral Yoga, a powerful synthesis that incorporated the major traditional systems of yoga, and went beyond all of them? **A rishi** (a seer) and **a muni** (a thinker) rolled in one? Or, **a spiritual master**, radical, rational and revolutionary, far ahead of his times, who is today the Guru to millions in the world?

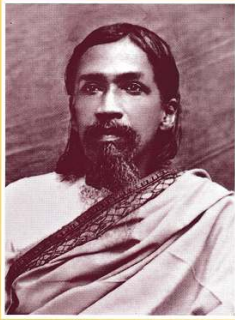
Sri Aurobindo was all this, and more. Due to our limitations, *The Call Beyond*, however, will concentrate on Sri Aurobindo, the writer. In the category of spiritual literature rooted in the Indian tradition, the original of which was written in the English language, Sri Aurobindo's works belong to a class apart, both in quantity and quality. In his works, Sri Aurobindo has given nothing short of a prescription for sculpting humanity into a new shape that would be beyond recognition. Even through the works that have their origin in the *Arya*, which were written over a period of just six years (1914-1920), he has created enough homework for the world to stay busy with for several centuries.

The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA) run into 36 volumes. The humble offering of *The Call Beyond*, however, would be limited to bringing you every month just the glimpses of one of the works of Sri Aurobindo.



## The Human Cycle

The Human Cycle  
The Ideal of Human Unity  
War and Self-Determination



Sri Aurobindo

In *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo has looked at the history of the world. And, when Sri Aurobindo looks at something, it is guaranteed to be a unique look. In fact, 'unique' is an understatement; his look is completely out of this world. His approach to any subject is beyond what the reader might have imagined, rather beyond what the reader could have imagined. **His treatment of the subject is both global and radical.** It is global because it is the widest and most comprehensive manner in which the subject may be seen. It is also radical. **The word radical has two connotations: fundamental and unconventional, and both these apply to Sri Aurobindo's treatment of a subject.** He goes to the very roots, the heart, the core of the subject. Secondly, he also looks at it in an original and uncommon way, completely unrestrained by convention or precedent. That is exactly what he has done also while looking at the history of the world in *The Human Cycle*. That is also the reason why his works have universal value and validity, extending far beyond the context in which the work was created. *The Human Cycle* is a compilation of essays published in the monthly journal, the *Arya*, from 1916-1918. The essays were written under the title 'The Psychology of Social Development'. The background was the First World War, but what he ended up writing is a classic of perennial value.

*The Human Cycle* looks at the history of the world from a psychological standpoint. The collective psyche of a society influences history, and the collective psyche has a cyclic pattern. The cyclic pattern is logical, and can be understood in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of man. The major strength of man is his aspiration to seek the highest Truth; the major weaknesses of man are the ignorance in which he normally lives,



his tendency to slide down to the level of the ordinary mind, and his love for familiarity and mediocrity, which in turn explains man's frequent lapse into conventionality and stability.

For writing the essays on 'The Psychology of Social Development', Sri Aurobindo got the clue from a nineteenth century German historian, Karl Lamprecht. While Sri Aurobindo has praised Lamprecht for his originality, Sri Aurobindo has also pointed out the limitations of Lamprecht's approach. Lamprecht's approach is, firstly, focused on economic factors; secondly, it is too simplistic and ignores the zigzags of nature; and thirdly, it is silent on the inner meaning, the necessity and the goal of the phases through which the human societies pass. It is the last lacuna that Sri Aurobindo has addressed in his essays, which are now available to us as *The Human Cycle*. Let us look at the stages through which the collective psyche of human societies typically passes.

### **The Symbolic Stage**

The symbolic age is primarily the age of religion. The Divine is represented through symbols, and the symbols find an expression in social structure. An example is the development of the fourfold social order in India. In the Vedas, it has been said that the order sprang from the body of Brahma, the Creative Deity. Thus, the symbolic divine origin of the fourfold order found an expression in chaturvarna, or the four castes, as they are now called. But, in the age of symbolism, the principle behind the symbol is understood. Therefore, while the principle is fixed, the social form that it takes is sensible and flexible. Thus, the fourfold order was based on temperament and innate abilities, not on heredity. Hence a person was not stuck with a label right at birth. His caste was determined as his potential unfolded. As Sri Aurobindo says, in the symbolic stage, the spiritual aspect of the social expression predominates; the ethical and economic aspects are secondary and subordinate.



## The Typal Stage and the Age of Convention

As the rituals, norms and social practices that evolve during the symbolic stage become established, they are practiced mechanically as a matter of habit. The symbolism behind them is gradually forgotten. The practice of the established rituals and norms acquires an ethical connotation; their violation or non-observance is considered unethical. As a result, the spiritual character of the practice now takes the back seat, and it is the ethical aspect that predominates. Therefore, the laxity and flexibility associated with the practice in the symbolic stage is also lost. The practice may also acquire an economic element, as happened in case of the fourfold social order. This is the typical stage, because people tend to conform to a 'type'. **One can describe a society in this stage in terms of a stereotype without going very wrong.** This paves the way for the age of convention. Following conventions without thinking, doing what everybody else does without protest, and thinking as everybody else does without any attempt at originality become the norm. **Individuals lose their individuality, and attempts to express it prove embarrassing and even expensive.** Truth hides behind a dense cloud of rules, norms and taboos; reason is obscured by habit; and spirit is subordinated by form. Attempts to revive the spirit behind the forms are doomed for failure.

## The Age of Individualism and Reason

The age of convention has a stability that suits the basic human tendency to resist change. But what may be looked upon as stability may also be seen as stagnation. Conventions that become too mechanical, conventions originating in an environment that is outdated, conventions that sacrifice progress in the interest of convenience, conventions that ignore the individual in favour of the collective, can eventually get to a point that the gap between conventions and truth becomes intolerable. In the age of convention there is a tendency for religion to



become dogmatic, politics to become authoritarian, and the social order to become hierarchical. The result is that at least a few individuals in the society start yearning for a change. They find the atmosphere too suffocating, and get restless to breathe the air of reason, freedom and progress. Their efforts may not achieve much for a variety of reasons. First, it is very few pitted against too many. Secondly, the accumulated wisdom of centuries has some merit, which even the brightest of ideas of a few well-meaning intellectuals may not be able to match. Finally, the few who rebel and revolt against the prevailing norms are young, idealistic, courageous and passionate; and are so charged that they are impatient to change the world. Thus, there is a wide gap between their capacity and their goal. However, their number keeps growing, and when it has crossed a critical mass, they may succeed in bringing about a revolution which may install reason on a high pedestal. The result is that religion may become tolerant, politics democratic, and the social order egalitarian. The scale on which this type of changes happened in Europe during the Renaissance that started around the fifteenth century was unprecedented in history. The vitality and vigour that it unleashed led to European dominance in the world. What facilitated the dominance was that the East was caught in a state of slumber because it was at that time passing through the age of convention, which Europe had just overthrown. Hence, finding no strong opposition in the East, the West swept through the world as never before. What aided this political, economic and cultural invasion was also the growth of modern science and technology during the European Renaissance, which in turn improved communication and transport, generated prosperity through the industrial revolution, enhanced military prowess, and brought within reach an extremely comfortable, secure and tempting lifestyle.

However, while the new world order that was created by the European Renaissance appeared invincible, it had its weaknesses





and pitfalls, which Sri Aurobindo saw a hundred years ago. That prompted him to call the European civilization a sinking ship. First, human nature being what it is, the revolutions eventually led to a new political and social order, which once again installed a new type of powerful collective that dominated the individual. Thus, the revolutions started by individuals culminated in the decline of individualism. Secondly, social equality remained a distant dream; what was actually achieved was essentially the fourfold social order, although it was not given names such as brahman, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra. One may think that this would now lead to a rationalistic typical age. But Sri Aurobindo saw that that is not what would happen. What was likely to happen was the dawn of a supra-rational subjective age. That is because the West would rediscover the limitations of reason. In short, by ending with a pale copy of the fourfold order, and searching for a tool higher than reason, the Western thought would start converging with ancient Indian wisdom. However, the age of reason would not be a waste. Its lasting legacy in human evolution would be an element of democracy, and a healthy balance between the individual and the collective; between individual growth and collective good.

### *The Basis of Wars*

Sri Aurobindo makes a digression in *The Human Cycle* towards the lethal combination of collectivism at the national level, and individualism at the international level. At the national level develops a collective ego, which gives the nation a sense of superiority, and sometimes also justifies to it the moral right to impose its culture on the rest of the world; and to achieve this end, to embark on the mission of conquering the world. The collective ego of nations leads to the nations behaving as individuals in international relations. The clash of national egos may lead to wars. Assertion of the collective ego of Germany was the psychological basis of the First World War. While



Germany seems to be the culprit behind the War, other nations were not free from similar collective egos.

### *The Limitations of Reason*

In human beings, the faculty of reasoning is far better developed than in any other creature, and man is rightly proud of it. But reason is not a source of knowledge; it can organize and analyse knowledge, it can help us avoid certain errors, but it cannot generate knowledge. Apart from these general limitations, the West discovered that reason is not an appropriate tool for wiping out misery and suffering from the world.

**The success of the scientific enterprise initiated by the age of reason led to the fond hope and belief that science would somehow eradicate sorrow and suffering from the world. But that did not actually happen.** Then rationality, the tool which had led to scientific and technological progress, was pressed into service to devise new systems of education and new forms of government in the hope that these probably would reduce misery and suffering in the world. To understand why all these attempts failed, let us take two contrasting systems of government, democracy and communism. Both were rooted in rationality and both were well-intentioned. Who can have a quarrel with treating everybody as equal by giving each individual an equal right in electing the government, or attempting social justice by expecting from each according to his capacity and ensuring that each gets what he truly needs? **Why both democracy and communism failed was because of the average level of human consciousness, which in turn determines human nature.** Man is a mental creature, and the mind of the average man has evolved only up to the level that makes man see himself as a distinct individual rather than see the deeper truth that we are all united by the spirit of the Divine whom we all manifest. The separation being the dominant reality perceived by man makes the typical human personality ego-driven, which in turn means



that man considers his own needs to be more important than those of others; considers his own opinions to be more right than those of others. This is the basic reason why both democracy and communism were doomed to fail. Irrespective of the system of government, there would be a set of people who would hold positions of power. Because of being basically ego-driven personalities, these people, and others specially gifted in one way or the other, would be able to corner more than their share of the resources. That would lead to inequality. Further, reason being a versatile tool, which can justify everything, the cornering of excess resources would also be justified by those who manage to possess more than their share. Based on this justification, rules would be framed by these very people to legitimize the inequality. Legalized inequality would lead to injustice, and the consequent cruelty, misery and suffering. Therefore, in spite of the noble intentions embodied in the theory of democracy as well as communism, in practice, neither form of government fulfills the expectations of those who designed these systems. **The finest product of the age of reason was rationalistic humanism, which also failed to wipe out misery and suffering from the world for similar reasons.** However, the failure of all the experiments based on reason served a purpose; they taught the West that reason does not work when it comes to solving the problems of human existence. Sri Aurobindo had foreseen this, and knew that after exhausting the possibilities of reason, the West would start looking for a tool higher than reason. That would be the beginning of the supra-rational subjective age, and the resources needed for that age would be found in ancient Indian wisdom.

### **The Supra-Rational Subjective Age**

Just as neglect or suppression of reason stimulates the age of reason, the limitations and failure of reason in some vital spheres of life awakens in man the inherent aspiration for a higher Truth, which is inaccessible to reason. However, it is important to bear



in mind a few caveats. *First*, whatever is not rational is non-rational. **Non-rational can mean both infra-rational and supra-rational.** Infra-rational and supra-rational are both subjective, but their impact is just the opposite. The infra-rational basic urges, emotional pulls, passionate pursuit of ego-driven ambitions and desires, are all infra-rational in origin, and are worse than reason. *Secondly*, reason, when refined and purified, can take us pretty far on the right path. Therefore, reason, which is man's most trusted tool, should not be rejected or discarded. It should be improved upon, and transcended when it cannot take us any further, but at no stage can it be abandoned altogether. *Finally*, while one may ascend to supra-rational heights without labouring at the level of reason; in some cases, reason itself is the gateway to the supra-rational, as has happened in case of the Western societies.

Societies are complex. At any given point in time, people at the infra-rational level, rational level, and the supra-rational level, co-exist. But the era with which the society is identified depends on numbers. Thus, moving from the age of reason to the supra-rational age depends not as much on the emergence of a few individuals at the supra-rational level of consciousness, as on the receptivity of the society.

**Supra-rational consciousness changes human nature from being ego-driven to that which is love-driven.** Love is a uniting principle, based on a sense of oneness, or at least a sense of inter-relatedness, which is a deeper truth than the separation. The beauty of the supra-rational consciousness is that it can accommodate both individualism and collectivism. Individuals manifest the Divine in different ways, and the diversity has a purpose. At the same time, individual differences are superficial as compared to the oneness that unites all individuals. The foundation of oneness is that all expressions of individuality are merely different aspects of the same Reality, the same Divine.



Oneness leads to love; love acts as an antidote to the ego; and that is how love can solve the problems of human existence which reason cannot. **The hallmark of the supra-rational age would be that ego would be abandoned in favour of love as the pivot of human nature.**

### Closing thoughts

While the societies moving from the symbolic to the typical and then the rational and supra-rational age seems logical, the play of nature is too complex to follow such a simple course. Further, there could be digressions in history that interrupt this natural progression. Sri Aurobindo has discussed in *The Human Cycle*, all these aspects. For example, the age of reason can come to a sudden end with the rise of authoritarian regimes, and lead to another spell of conformism rooted in fear. Finally, history may not repeat itself exactly in the same way in every society. India, with its spiritual core, which has been asleep for a long time but is not dead, may not follow the same course as the West, which has a rational core. What has been done here is only to point out the general thrust of Sri Aurobindo's depiction of the cyclic nature of the collective psyche of societies and its impact on the history of the world.

*The Human Cycle* is not the history of a nation or a civilization but of the human race, from the pre-historic to the modern, with some reasoned and cautious predictions for the future. It is not a chronicle of events, but a view of history supported by events. **It explains the events rationally, but leaves the world free to learn from the past any lessons that it chooses to learn.** It moves with great facility from the mundane to the mystical, from the terrestrial to the spiritual planes. As in the case of all of the works of Sri Aurobindo, in *The Human Cycle* too, he has painted on a vast canvas which only he could handle.



## Selections from 'The Human Cycle'\*

### Questioning Convention

The individualistic age of Europe was in its beginning a revolt of reason, in its culmination a triumphal progress of physical Science. Such an evolution was historically inevitable. The dawn of individualism is always a questioning, a denial. The individual finds a religion imposed upon him which does not base its dogma and practice upon a living sense of ever verifiable spiritual Truth, but on the letter of an ancient book, the infallible dictum of a Pope, the tradition of a Church, the learned casuistry of schoolmen and Pundits, conclaves of ecclesiastics, heads of monastic orders, doctors of all sorts, all of them unquestionable tribunals whose sole function is to judge and pronounce, but none of whom seems to think it necessary or even allowable to search, test, prove, inquire, discover. He finds that, as is inevitable under such a regime, true science and knowledge are either banned, punished and persecuted or else rendered obsolete by the habit of blind reliance on fixed authorities; even what is true in old authorities is no longer of any value, because its words are learnedly or ignorantly repeated but its real sense is no longer lived except at most by a few. In politics he finds everywhere divine rights, established privileges, sanctified tyrannies which are evidently armed with an oppressive power and justify themselves by long prescription, but seem to have no real claim or title to exist. In the social order he finds an equally stereotyped reign of convention, fixed disabilities, fixed privileges, the self-regarding arrogance of the high, the blind prostration of the low, while the old functions which might have justified at one time such a distribution of status are either not performed at all or badly performed without any sense of obligation and merely as a part of caste pride.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 16-17)*

\*Titles added by the editor



## Compelled to Relook, Reevaluate and Recast

In India, since the great Buddhistic upheaval of the national thought and life, there has been a series of recurrent attempts to rediscover the truth of the soul and life and get behind the veil of stifling conventions; but these have been conducted by a wide and tolerant spiritual reason, a plastic soul intuition and deep subjective seeking, insufficiently militant and destructive. Although productive of great internal and considerable external changes, they have never succeeded in getting rid of the predominant conventional order. The work of a dissolvent and destructive intellectual criticism, though not entirely absent from some of these movements, has never gone far enough; the constructive force, insufficiently aided by the destructive, has not been able to make a wide and free space for its new formation. **It is only with the period of European influence and impact that circumstances and tendencies powerful enough to enforce the beginnings of a new age of radical and effective revaluation of ideas and things have come into existence.** The characteristic power of these influences has been throughout—or at any rate till quite recently—rationalistic, utilitarian and individualistic. It has compelled the national mind to view everything from a new, searching and critical standpoint, and even those who seek to preserve the present or restore the past are obliged unconsciously or half-consciously to justify their endeavour from the novel point of view and by its appropriate standards of reasoning. **Throughout the East, the subjective Asiatic mind is being driven to adapt itself to the need for changed values of life and thought.** It has been forced to turn upon itself both by the pressure of Western knowledge and by the compulsion of a quite changed life-need and life-environment. What it did not do from within, has come on it as a necessity from without and this externality has carried with it an immense advantage as well as great dangers.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, p. 27)*



## To be Human is to go Beyond Oneself

Man, the mental being in Nature, is especially distinguished from her less developed creatures by a greater power of individuality, by the liberation of the mental consciousness which enables him finally to understand more and more himself and his law of being and his development, by the liberation of the mental will which enables him under the secret control of the universal Will to manage more and more the materials and lines of his development and by the capacity in the end to go beyond himself, beyond his mentality and open his consciousness into that from which mind, life and body proceed. **He can even, however imperfectly at present, get at his highest to some consciousness of the Reality which is his true being and possess consciously also, as nothing else in terrestrial Nature can possess, the Self, the Idea, the Will which have constituted him and can become by that the master of his own nature and increasingly, not as now he is, a wrestler with dominant circumstance but the master of Nature.** To do this, to arrive through mind and beyond mind at the Self, the Spirit which expresses itself in all Nature and, becoming one with it in his being, his force, his consciousness, his will, his knowledge, to possess at once humanly and divinely—according to the law and nature of human existence, but of human existence fulfilled in God and fulfilling God in the world—both himself and the world is the destiny of man and the object of his individual and social existence.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 64-65)*

## Reason can Enlighten Ethics and Aesthetics

Neither the ethical being nor the aesthetic being is the whole man, nor can either be his sovereign principle; they are merely two powerful elements. **Ethical conduct is not the whole of life; even to say that it is three-fourths of life is to indulge in a very doubtful mathematics.** We cannot assign to it its





position in any such definite language, but can at best say that its kernel of will, character and self-discipline are almost the first condition for human self-perfection. The aesthetic sense is equally indispensable, for without that the self-perfection of the mental being cannot arrive at its object, which is on the mental plane the right and harmonious possession and enjoyment of the truth, power, beauty and delight of human existence. But neither can be the highest principle of the human order. We can combine them; we can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight and introduce into it to correct its tendency of hardness and austerity the element of gentleness, love, amenity, the hedonistic side of morals; we can steady, guide and strengthen the delight of life by the introduction of the necessary will and austerity and self-discipline which will give it endurance and purity. These two powers of our psychological being, which represent in us the essential principle of energy and the essential principle of delight,—the Indian terms are more profound and expressive, Tapas and Ananda,—can be thus helped by each other, the one to a richer, the other to a greater self-expression. But that even this much reconciliation may come about they must be taken up and enlightened by a higher principle which must be capable of understanding and comprehending both equally and of disengaging and combining disinterestedly their purposes and potentialities. That higher principle seems to be provided for us by the human faculty of reason and intelligent will. Our crowning capacity, it would seem to be by right the crowned sovereign of our nature.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 100-101)*

### **Use, Misuse And Abuse of Reason**

The highest power of reason, because its pure and characteristic power, is the disinterested seeking after true knowledge. **When knowledge is pursued for its own sake, then alone are we**



**likely to arrive at true knowledge.** Afterwards we may utilise that knowledge for various ends; but if from the beginning we have only particular ends in view, then we limit our intellectual gain, limit our view of things, distort the truth because we cast it into the mould of some particular idea or utility and ignore or deny all that conflicts with that utility or that set idea. By so doing we may indeed make the reason act with great immediate power within the limits of the idea or the utility we have in view, just as instinct in the animal acts with great power within certain limits, for a certain end, yet finds itself helpless outside those limits. It is so indeed that the ordinary man uses his reason—as the animal uses his hereditary, transmitted instinct—with an absorbed devotion of it to the securing of some particular utility or with a useful but hardly luminous application of a customary and transmitted reasoning to the necessary practical interests of his life. Even the thinking man ordinarily limits his reason to the working out of certain preferred ideas; he ignores or denies all that is not useful to these or does not assist or justify or actually contradicts or seriously modifies them,—except in so far as life itself compels or cautions him to accept modifications for the time being or ignore their necessity at his peril. It is in such limits that man's reason normally acts. He follows most commonly some interest or set of interests; he tramples down or through or ignores or pushes aside all truth of life and existence, truth of ethics, truth of beauty, truth of reason, truth of spirit which conflicts with his chosen opinions and interests; if he recognises these foreign elements, it is nominally, not in practice, or else with a distortion, a glossing which nullifies their consequences, perverts their spirit or whittles down their significance. **It is this subjection to the interests, needs, instincts, passions, prejudices, traditional ideas and opinions of the ordinary mind which constitutes the irrationality of human existence.**

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 106-107)*



## An Alien Language

The limitations of the reason become very strikingly, very characteristically, very nakedly apparent when it is confronted with that great order of psychological truths and experiences which we have hitherto kept in the background—the religious being of man and his religious life. Here is a realm at which the intellectual reason gazes with the bewildered mind of a foreigner who hears a language of which the words and the spirit are unintelligible to him and sees everywhere forms of life and principles of thought and action which are absolutely strange to his experience. **He may try to learn this speech and understand this strange and alien life; but it is with pain and difficulty, and he cannot succeed unless he has, so to speak, unlearned himself and become one in spirit and nature with the natives of this Celestial Empire.** Till then his efforts to understand and interpret them in his own language and according to his own notions end at the worst in a gross misunderstanding and deformation. **The attempts of the positive critical reason to dissect the phenomena of the religious life sound to men of spiritual experience like the prattle of a child who is trying to shape into the mould of his own habitual notions the life of adults or the blunders of an ignorant mind which thinks fit to criticise patronisingly or adversely the labours of a profound thinker or a great scientist.** At the best even this futile labour can extract, can account for only the externals of the things it attempts to explain; the spirit is missed, the inner matter is left out, and as a result of that capital omission even the account of the externals is left without real truth and has only an apparent correctness.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, p. 129)*

## The Dilemma of Balancing Individual Freedom With Collective Development

Given a full development and free play of the individual mind, the need of freedom will grow with the immense variation



which this development must bring with it, and if only a free play in thought and reason is allowed, but if the free play of the intelligent will in life and action is inhibited by the excessive regulation of the life, then an intolerable contradiction and falsity will be created. Men may bear it for a time in consideration of the great and visible new benefits of order, economic development, means of efficiency and the scientific satisfaction of the reason which the collectivist arrangement of society will bring; but when its benefits become a matter of course and its defects become more and more realised and prominent, dissatisfaction and revolt are sure to set in in the clearest and most vigorous minds of the society and propagate themselves throughout the mass. This intellectual and vital dissatisfaction may very well take under such circumstances the form of anarchistic thought, because that thought appeals precisely to this need of free variation in the internal life and its outward expression which will be the source of revolt, and anarchistic thought must be necessarily subversive of the socialistic order. The State can only combat it by an education adapted to its fixed forms of life, an education that will seek to drill the citizen in a fixed set of ideas, aptitudes, propensities as was done in the old infrarational order of things and by the suppression of freedom of speech and thinking so as to train and compel all to be of one mind, one sentiment, one opinion, one feeling; but this remedy will be in a rational society self-contradictory, ineffective, or if effective, then worse than the evil it seeks to combat. On the other hand, if from the first freedom of thought is denied, that means the end of the Age of Reason and of the ideal of a rational society. **Man the mental being disallowed the use—except in a narrow fixed groove— of his mind and mental will, will stop short in his growth and be even as the animal and as the insect a stationary species.**

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 211-212)*



## Individuals Suffer Burn-Outs, and so do Societies

Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a widespread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. **All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline.** Modern society has discovered a new principle of survival, progress, but the aim of that progress it has never discovered, —unless the aim is always more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater and still greater complexity of the social economy, a more and more cumbrously opulent life. But these things must lead in the end where the old led, for they are only the same thing on a larger scale; they lead in a circle, that is to say, nowhere: they do not escape from the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, they do not really find the secret of self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality, but only seem for a moment to find it by the illusion of a series of experiments each of which ends in disappointment. That so far has been the nature of modern progress. Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, p. 224)*



## The Question of Questions

Nietzsche's idea that to develop the superman out of our present very unsatisfactory manhood is our real business, is in itself an absolutely sound teaching. His formulation of our aim, "to become ourselves", "to exceed ourselves", implying, as it does, that man has not yet found all his true self, his true nature by which he can successfully and spontaneously live, could not be bettered. **But then the question of questions is there, what is our self, and what is our real nature? What is that which is growing in us, but into which we have not yet grown?** It is something divine, is the answer, a divinity Olympian, Apollonian, Dionysiac, which the reasoning and consciously willing animal, man, is labouring more or less obscurely to become. Certainly, it is all that; but in what shall we find the seed of that divinity and what is the poise in which the superman, once self-found, can abide and be secure from lapse into this lower and imperfect manhood? Is it the intellect and will, the double aspected buddhi of the Indian psychological system? But this is at present a thing so perplexed, so divided against itself, so uncertain of everything it gains, up to a certain point indeed magically creative and efficient but, when all has been said and done, in the end so splendidly futile, so at war with and yet so dependent upon and subservient to our lower nature, that even if in it there lies concealed some seed of the entire divinity, it can hardly itself be the seed and at any rate gives us no such secure and divine poise as we are seeking. Therefore we say, not the intellect and will, but that supreme thing in us yet higher than the Reason, the spirit, here concealed behind the coatings of our lower nature, is the secret seed of the divinity and will be, when discovered and delivered, luminous above the mind, the wide ground upon which a divine life of the human being can be with security founded.

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 232-233)*



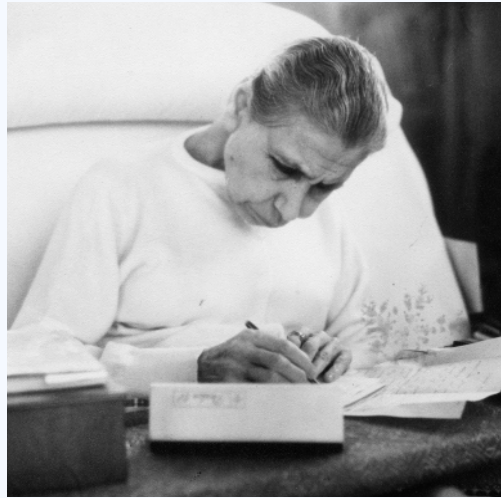
## Deceptive Excuses That Fail To Deceive

For the way that humanity deals with an ideal is to be satisfied with it as an aspiration which is for the most part left only as an aspiration, accepted only as a partial influence. The ideal is not allowed to mould the whole life, but only more or less to colour it; it is often used even as a cover and a plea for things that are diametrically opposed to its real spirit. Institutions are created which are supposed, but too lightly supposed to embody that spirit and the fact that the ideal is held, the fact that men live under its institutions is treated as sufficient. **The holding of an ideal becomes almost an excuse for not living according to the ideal; the existence of its institutions is sufficient to abrogate the need of insisting on the spirit that made the institutions.** But spirituality is in its very nature a thing subjective and not mechanical; it is nothing if it is not lived inwardly and if the outward life does not flow out of this inward living. Symbols, types, conventions, ideas are not sufficient. A spiritual symbol is only a meaningless ticket, unless the thing symbolised is realised in the spirit. A spiritual convention may lose or expel its spirit and become a falsehood. A spiritual type may be a temporary mould into which spiritual living may flow, but it is also a limitation and may become a prison in which it fossilises and perishes. A spiritual idea is a power, but only when it is both inwardly and outwardly creative. Here we have to enlarge and to deepen the pragmatic principle that truth is what we create, and in this sense first, that it is what we create within us, in other words, what we become. Undoubtedly, spiritual truth exists eternally beyond independent of us in the heavens of the spirit; but it is of no avail for humanity here, it does not become truth of earth, truth of life until it is lived. **The divine perfection is always there above us; but for man to become divine in consciousness and act and to live inwardly and outwardly the divine life is what is meant by spirituality; all lesser meanings given to the word are inadequate fumbings or impostures.**

*(Sri Aurobindo: The Human Cycle, CWSA Vol. 25, pp. 262-263)*



## Do Not Leave the Path



When you are on the path, do not ever leave it. Wait a little, you can hesitate as long as you want before taking it; but the minute you set your foot on it, it is finished, don't leave it. Because this has consequences which can even extend to several lives. It is something very serious. That is why, besides, I never push anyone to take the path. You are quite a number of children here; I have never asked anyone – only those who came to me and told me, “I want it.” And to these also, unless I am absolutely sure of them because it is written in their destiny that they have come for that, I always say, “Think about it, think, be quite sure that this is what you want and nothing else.” And when they have reflected and decided, it is finished....

I mean, one should not leave the path any more. One should go forward at all costs and try not to stop too often on the way, because it is easier to continue even if it is hard, you see, than to begin all over again when one has stopped. A much greater effort is needed to get going again than to continue on the way.

*The Mother ('The Great Adventure', p. 45)*

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*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>*

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## Where Do We Stand?

Drishti

One of the major works of Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, appeared initially in the *Arya* under the title *The Psychology of Social Development* during the years 1916-18. In these articles, Sri Aurobindo examined the influence of the collective psyche of a society on history, and came to the conclusion that societies typically go through a cyclic process in their social development.

### The cycle

The successive periods that constitute the cycle were named by Sri Aurobindo as the symbolic age, the age of convention, the age of reason, and the subjective age. *The symbolic age* is religious in character, and symbols and symbolic rituals dominate life. However, with the passage of time, only the religious practices continue, but the significance underlying the symbols is forgotten. The rituals become rigid, their practice becomes mechanical, and few understand what the practices signify. In general, the society becomes highly conventional in its approach, and forms subordinate the underlying spirit. The courage to question or oppose the prevalent norms more or less disappears from the society. This is *the age of convention*. But even during the age of convention, a few individuals, whose critical faculties survive in spite of the social milieu, do question the conventions. They want to know the 'why' behind the conventions, and refuse to follow the herd. They have to pay the price for swimming against the current, but the innate human urge for freedom eventually breaks through all barriers. When the number of rebellious and revolutionary original thinkers crosses a threshold, they start having an impact on the social attitudes. That is how a society moves from the age of convention into the *age of reason*. **The age of reason is a glorious period, a period of healthy debate, a period of co-existence of conflicting philosophies.** The encouragement that the spirit of enquiry and freedom of thought receive during the age of reason



leads to rapid growth of science and technology. However, while the society, in general, places rationality on a pedestal, a few individuals also start seeing the limitations of reason. All the knowledge gained by the application of reason fails to reduce evil and injustice in society, and therefore suffering continues to characterize human life. Realization of the limits of reason is the beginning of the *subjective supra-rational age*. **The subjective age does not throw away or minimize the gains of reason, but adds a non-rational dimension to life.** Whatever is non-rational is not necessarily to be shunned because while reason is a powerful tool, it is neither the source of infallible knowledge nor the ultimate arbiter of what is right or wrong. Therefore, to use Sri Aurobindo's terminology, whatever is non-rational can be either infra-rational or supra-rational. Raw unrefined emotions are infra-rational, and their unbridled play can be disastrous. But conscious contact with the dynamic aspect of our soul gives us access to knowledge which is beyond the reach of reason. The dynamic aspect of our soul does not need the crutch of reason to know what is true or what is right. Therefore, working in the light of our soul, which is supra-rational, is more reliable than using reason alone. This realization comes to a society when it has more or less exhausted the potential of reason, and as a result it enters the subjective age of spiritual wisdom.

### Where is India today?

India has gone through the cycle, probably more than once, in its long and chequered history. For example, the Vedic age was its symbolic age, and the Upanishadic age its subjective supra-rational age, but coming to relatively recent history, India seems to have entered the age of convention about a thousand years ago. Before it had the time to graduate to the age of reason, it was enslaved, partly because of the degeneration that had set in during the age of convention. **Slavery promotes the instinct to preserve one's identity, and that can be most easily and safely done by sticking to conventions.** Conventions promote conformism, and that thwarts progress but all the same provides stability. The result was



that through its long spell of slavery, India got stuck in the age of convention. That is reflected in many of our common spontaneous expressions, which we take as perfectly natural and reasonable, such as “everybody says so, and hence...”, “everybody does that, and hence...”, “X (an authority figure) says so, and hence...”, “X (an authoritative book) says so, and hence...”, and worst of all, “We are A/B/C, and therefore we have to do this or that”, where A/B/C may be Hindu/Muslim/Christian or Punjabi/Gujarati/Tamilian. It is the suffocating dominance of convention, authority and habit that made Tagore express his anguish in his famous poem in Gitanjali, “Where the mind is without fear... Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit ... Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.” **Sri Aurobindo, although a lover of the spiritual culture of India, was critical of its recent manifestations. He wrote, “Our civilization has got ossified, our dharma a bigotry of externals, our spirituality a faint glimmer of light or a momentary wave of intoxication”** (Nadkarni 2006, p. 84).

### **Advancing towards reason**

Although we are still far from the “heaven of freedom” that Tagore dreamt of, there are hopeful signs of the rebels driven by reason making their presence felt. Several factors have contributed to this shift. First and foremost, the political freedom that we earned in 1947 was a milestone in this direction. Secondly, the partition of the country that accompanied the freedom, with all its disastrous fallouts, perhaps contributed to the erosion of conventions. For those who were uprooted from their home and hearth by partition, the first priority was bread and shelter, not preserving conventions. **Difficult circumstances force us to use our head, because the stability inherent in sticking to accustomed ways has been shattered anyway.** The other factors that have contributed to the on-going transition from convention to reason are economic growth, and the increasing role that media play in moulding social attitudes. Economic growth gives one,



education; and two, the leisure to think, reflect, experiment and explore. The media have helped in bringing audiovisual material from different parts of the country as well as the world within the reach of even people living in villages and urban slums. The result is that even those whose material means are meagre, whose social life is convention-ridden, and whose access to formal education is limited, are exposed to how people live and think elsewhere. As a result, their younger generation feels the urge to reason, and to break through the prison of conventions. They not only want to study and travel, they also want to dress as they like, marry whomsoever they like.

Some of the visible signs of the transition from the age of convention to that of reason are first, the mushrooming of literary and artistic creativity, as happened during the scholastic age of Europe in the thirteenth century. Secondly, there is proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), initiated and manned by young people, many of whom have given up lucrative careers with the intention of liberating the society from one social evil or another. Thirdly, marriages across caste and creed divisions are on the rise. Finally, the courage to question authority is much in evidence; even godmen are being questioned.

### **Where is the West today?**

Skipping the details, Western Europe entered the age of convention during the Roman Empire, and remained stuck in it through the dark ages, arbitrarily fixed by Charles Singer from 400 AD to 1543 AD, a period of more than a thousand years. A glimmer of hope appeared during the scholastic age in the thirteenth century. The scholars of the 13th century were still subservient to the twin authority of antiquity and religion. But there was revival of learning, which laid the foundations of the European Renaissance. The most progressive author of this period was Roger Bacon (1214-1294), who did not hesitate to criticize authority, and paid the price for his audacity by spending many years in prison. It



was rebels like him who led Europe from the age of convention to the age of reason. Charles Singer has chosen 1543 as the year of the onset of the European Renaissance. The justification for such a precise date is that during that year appeared two publications of great importance. One was a book on Astronomy by Copernicus, and the other a book on Anatomy by Vesalius. **Both these books, for the first time after more than a thousand years, dared place greater reliance on observation than on authority.** Science had at last managed to loosen the grip of the ancient classics. The spirit of enquiry could once again breathe freely without the Church clipping its nose. The freedom of thought ushered in by the Renaissance led to the developments in science, which led to the growth of technology, which in turn culminated in the Industrial Revolution. The result was that by the nineteenth century, the lives of those who benefitted the most from the Industrial Revolution became very comfortable, and it was the fond hope of all well-meaning people that science and technology would finally solve all the problems of human existence. But that did not happen; the degree of evil, injustice and suffering did not decline one bit. The response to this failure was that, Reason, the instrument that had led to the development of science and technology, was pressed into service to solve the problems of human existence by devising new systems of education and new forms of government. While democracy, socialism and communism are all based on logic and good intentions, none of these made any dent on human misery. The finest product of the application of reason to human affairs was humanism. However, even this rational code of ethics failed to diminish the evil, injustice, cruelty and suffering in the world. The reason behind these failures, according to Sri Aurobindo, was that the level of human consciousness continued to be low. Therefore, even the best system, when put into action by human beings with an ego-driven mental consciousness, does not achieve the intended results. Irrespective of the system, power gets concentrated in the hands of relatively few, leaving the rest at their mercy. Those who have the power, somehow



or the other manage to suppress and deprive those who are powerless because at the present level of human consciousness, personal greed motivates human actions. Further, man's well-developed intellect manages to find even a justification for his actions. However, all these failed experiments were necessary, and served a purpose. It was because of these failures that when Europe, and the West in general, had exhausted the potential of reason in solving the basic problems of human existence, these societies started looking at ancient Indian wisdom. That is how Europe entered the subjective supra-rational age in the twentieth century.

### **How does the past explain the present?**

Looking at history in terms of the cyclic process visualized by Sri Aurobindo explains many common observations. It explains the high receptivity of the Western world to ancient Indian wisdom. Yoga and Buddhism are the two most popular export products of India today. It explains the movement of the Western world from conventional religions towards spirituality. The lead article in the 12 March 2012 issue of the Time magazine was '10 Ideas That Are Changing Your Life'. One of these 'ideas', according to the author, Amy Sullivan, is 'The Rise of the Nones'. 'The nones' is the name that social scientists give to those who declare that they have no affiliation to any organized religion. The nones are the fastest-growing religious group in the U.S., and are currently estimated to form 16 percent of the American population. The nones have rejected organized religion but believe in God, engage in spiritual conversation and prayer, and participate in humanitarian work. The West, having graduated from the age of reason to the supra-rational age, is ready to receive, or rather thirsty to pocket ancient Indian spiritual wisdom. Here is a sample: "Aurobindo is the greatest contemporary philosopher and great in the company of the greatest mystics of all time ... . Because Aurobindo is in this world, the world is becoming able to express progressively unity and diversity instead of division,



love instead of hatred, truth consciousness instead of falsehood, freedom instead of tyranny, immortality instead of death”, wrote Rev. E.E.F. Hill in 1949 (Nadkarni 2006, pp. 86-87). India, on the other hand, is struggling to come out of the shackles of convention, including those of the rituals and dogmas of conventional religion, in its march towards the age of reason. That is why, India does not seem to be ready to accept its own wisdom. “Our intelligentsia has been swearing by Darwin, Freud and Karl Marx but they have simply ignored Sri Aurobindo, one of the few independent thinkers that India produced in the 20th century, who dealt mainly with the same issues that these three thinkers did and in the light of whose writings we are better able to appreciate them because he presents the complete truth which each of these thinkers distorted in his own way”, wrote Dr. Mangesh Nadkarni (Nadkarni 2006, pp. 87-88).

### **Where do we go from here?**

In terms of recent history, we are where Europe was about seven hundred years ago. Does it mean that we have to wait that long to catch up, to appreciate and apply our own ancient wisdom? While it is true that history repeats itself, it does not repeat itself exactly. And, there are many reasons why we can expect to bridge the gap much faster. *First*, we do not have the type of conflict that Europe had between religion and science. Our indigenous spiritual tradition, Vedanta, is insight-based, and therefore gives the individual the freedom to explore and acquire his own insights. This freedom is so much in our DNA that it always leaves room for deviation from conventions. What we need is to use this freedom with conviction and logic. *Secondly*, developments in technology have made the world much smaller. Not only has that made it easier for the West to access Indian wisdom, it has also made it much easier for us to know the social transformation currently going on in the West, and to get influenced by it. *Finally*, since the West is looking up to India for solving the problems of human existence, we are under a global scanner. Since we are



being watched, the contrast will eventually 'compel' us to give a better expression to our nation soul.

### Closing thoughts

Sri Aurobindo's vision was futuristic, was deeply rooted in the evolutionary perspective, and encompassed the entire human race. He visualized that the mental consciousness, of which reason is the best tool, had reached its limits. The next leap in evolution would lead to a qualitatively different type of consciousness, which he termed supramental. While the mental consciousness creates the impression of division being the final reality, the supramental consciousness would be rooted in unity. The result would be a world full of love, peace and harmony. Ancient Indian wisdom is poised to play an important role in creating this new world. In that sense, India has already started playing the role of the world guru. The world is moving towards a higher consciousness. The motive force for the revolutionary change is ancient Indian wisdom. But the epicenter of the change seems to lie in the Western world. In the larger design of the Divine, it will make no difference. In that design there is no East and West; it is just one world and one human race. It is up to the Indians of today to decide how far we want to be a part of the revolution that is changing the very face of the human race.

### Reference

Mangesh Nadkarni. India's Spiritual Destiny: Its Inevitability and Potentiality. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, in association with UBS Publishers, 2006

*It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. ... after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfill India's true destiny.*

*Sri Aurobindo, in his message to the nation through the Andhra University in 1948*





## The Impossible Dream

Art Buchwald



*Art Buchwald  
(1925-2007)  
(Source: quotetab.  
org/Google images)*

I was in town recently and took a ride in a taxi with a friend. When we got out of the cab, my friend said to the driver, "Thank you for the ride. You did a superb job of driving." The taxi driver was stunned for a second. Then he said, "Are you a wise guy or something?" "No, my dear man, and I'm not putting you on. I admire the way you keep your cool in heavy traffic." "Yeah", the driver said and drove off.

"What was that all about?" I asked, "I am trying to bring love back," he said. "It's the only thing that can save the city." "How can one man save this city?"

"It's not one man. I believe I have made that taxi driver's day. Suppose he has twenty fares. He is going to be nice to those fares because someone was nice to him. Those fares in turn will be kinder to their employees or shopkeepers or waiters or even their own families. They in turn will be nicer to other people. Eventually the goodwill could spread to at least a thousand people. Now that isn't bad, is it?"

"But you're depending on that taxi driver to pass your goodwill to others."

"I am not depending on it," my friend said "I am aware that the system isn't foolproof. I might deal with ten different people today. If, out of ten, I can make three happy, then eventually I can indirectly influence the attitudes of three thousand more."

"It sounds good," I admitted, "but I'm not sure it works."



“Nothing is lost if it doesn’t. It didn’t take any of my time to tell that man he was doing a good job. If it fell on deaf ears, so what? Tomorrow there will be another taxi driver I can try to make happy.” “You are some kind of a nut,” I said. “That shows how cynical you have become. I have made a study of this. The thing that seems to be lacking, besides money of course, for our postal employees is that no one tells what a good job they are doing.” “But they are not doing a good job,” I said. “They are not doing good job because they feel no one cares if they do or not. Why shouldn’t someone say a kind word to them? When people will digest my words, they will feel better for it. Somehow the city will benefit from their happiness.” “But you can’t do this all alone!” I protested. You’re just one man.”

“The most important thing is not to get discouraged. Making people in the city become kind again is not an easy job, but if I can enlist other people in my campaign...”

*Courtesy: Reader’s Digest*

*(Reproduced from ‘The Call Beyond’, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1997, pp. 30-31)*



*The widest spirituality does not exclude or discourage any essential human activity or faculty, but works rather to lift all of them up out of their imperfection and groping ignorance, transforms them by its touch and makes them the instruments of the light, power and joy of the divine being and the divine nature.*

*- Sri Aurobindo (‘The Human Cycle’, CWSA Vol. 25, p. 135)*

*The highest power of reason, because its pure and characteristic power, is the disinterested seeking after true knowledge.*

*- Sri Aurobindo (‘The Human Cycle’, CWSA Vol. 25, p. 106)*



*Whether it is the disciple who chooses the Guru, or it is the Guru who chooses the disciple may be debatable, but fascinating and often incredible are the stories behind their being brought together. This column will bring you the circumstances under which some of the foremost disciples of Sri Aurobindo felt his unmistakable magnetic pull.*

## **Tehmi-Ben (1917-2004)**

### **Always Dressed in the Colour Called White**

R. Hemamalini



(Source: Seven Dedicated Lives by Sunayana Panda)

Born in Bombay, Tehmi-Ben belonged to an educated Parsi family. Both her parents were doctors. Her father became the physician and surgeon to the Nawabs of Bhopal. That is why, Tehmi's childhood was spent in a palatial house amidst the royal opulence of the rulers. Despite being the Nawab's doctor and friend, her father never allowed his children to enjoy any special privileges.

While Tehmi-Ben fondly recounts memories of her early childhood in Bhopal, there is no trace of trying to show-off – a common consequence of growing up amidst luxury. Giving a glimpse of the grandeur of the royal palace in Bhopal, Tehmi-Ben describes the beautifully clad men with their blue turbans and white buttoned-up coats, the marble-paved Durbar hall, walls adorned with portraits of the royal family, the elephant and camel regiments, and the beautiful lighting of the terraces on special occasions. She also recounts how she felt while walking through the grand hallways of the Nawab's palace adorned with heads and skins of the wild beasts – on one hand, she would be afraid because these were wild animals, and on the other she would not be because the animals were dead. As a



child, she was old enough to understand that dead tigers can do no harm, but yet could not keep fear completely away.

This abundance, security and comfort of childhood left Tehmi-Ben free to address the finer and nobler aspects of life. In her case, this opportunity translated into spiritual-seeking at a relatively young age. Her father was a religious person, whose routine included hours of early morning prayers after a bath with ice cold water. This was her introduction to spirituality. Tehmi-Ben looked up to her father for his self-control and inner strength. She tried to cultivate these qualities in herself, and was remarkably successful at it. The weather in Pondicherry was very different from that in Bhopal or Bombay, and yet she had no problem with it. She grew up seeing her mother, a gynaecologist-surgeon educated in Ireland, sacrifice her career for a reason which may seem rather bizarre. Fearing for her safety in case there were patient deaths during labour, Tehmi-Ben's father decided that her mother should not pursue her medical practice in Bhopal where people could turn fiercely aggressive and violent under such conditions. Her mother's happy acceptance of life's circumstances was instrumental in Tehmi-Ben's own acceptance of life as it evolved for her.

Tehmi-Ben and her brother spent only their early childhood in Bhopal. When Tehmi was eight, she and her brother were sent to Bombay so that they could receive western education. Tehmi-Ben's education was predominantly in a Christian Missionary school and college, where she was taught by highly qualified teachers and by the Jesuit fathers. She graduated in English literature and started teaching at the Sophia College in Bomnbay. She was drawn towards spirituality by a few books she read on the subject. She learnt about Integral Yoga through Sri Aurobindo's works and got keenly interested in it. So much so that only after a couple of visits to the Pondicherry Ashram, she decided to resign from her job so that she could move to Pondicherry. She settled permanently in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, at the age of 31.



In the ashram, her abode was the 'Golconde' where she lived for more than 50 years. She did not want to return to teaching: she wanted an activity that would need less application of the intellect. As if the Mother read her mind, she was initially entrusted the responsibility of overseeing carpenters. This was a welcome respite for her, as she moved from a work profile that was predominantly mental to one that was physically demanding. These moments of respite offer great opportunities for mind rejuvenation, and the freedom to 'rest' the incessant unidirectional, thought process. Sometimes, outwardly mundane, mechanical jobs offer the mental quietude required for connecting with the inner Self. For similar reasons, a researcher may enjoy occasionally washing the laboratory glassware.

After she had overseen carpenters for two years, and worked for some time in the ashram library, she was asked by the Mother to teach at the school. This task, now she took up enthusiastically, as a fish takes to water. Since the school lacked the usual humdrum of a rigid structure, it afforded her a great opportunity to experiment, drawing upon her years of teaching experience and the insights she had gained from it. What can be more satisfying to a teacher, than to be at a place where she can teach as teaching should be – creative and innovative?

At the school, Tehmi-Ben, devised a curriculum keeping creativity as the central focus. Her disciplined upbringing in a convent school also helped her impart similar qualities to her pupils. Firm, and yet loving, she was in every way the model teacher who inspired many of her pupils to follow in her footsteps as teachers. She introduced the study of Greek and Roman mythology in the curriculum, one of the aims of which was to help students with a better appreciation of western culture.

Always clad in a white saree, worn Gujarati style, Tehmi-Ben had the image of a very knowledgeable and highly talented person. When asked if she never got tired of wearing white sarees, she



said, “People think that white is not a colour. For me, white is actually a very bright colour.” Besides teaching, Tehmi-Ben also contributed to the Ashram by translating Sri Aurobindo’s English writings into French, and the Mother’s French writings into English – she had an excellent command over both the languages. She had many other talents too. She wrote plays and poems, and painted the Mother’s sarees and birthday cards. After decades of sadhana through various types of work done in a self-effacing manner, she left the body in the year 2004.

### For Further Reading

*Seven Dedicated Lives* by Sunayana Panda. First Features Ltd., London, 2009.

Narad (Richard Eggenberger): Tehmi-Ben—the Early Years. *Mother India*, March 2006, p. 203. [https://www.sriaurobindoashram.org/journals/motherindia/issues/2006/3.\\_Mother\\_India\\_March\\_2006.pdf](https://www.sriaurobindoashram.org/journals/motherindia/issues/2006/3._Mother_India_March_2006.pdf)



*Behind everything in life there is an Absolute, which that thing is seeking after in its own way; everything finite is striving to express an infinite which it feels to be its real truth. Moreover, it is not only each class, each type, each tendency in Nature that is thus impelled to strive after its own secret truth in its own way, but each individual brings in his own variations. Thus there is not only an Absolute, an Infinite in itself which governs its own expression in many forms and tendencies, but there is also a principle of infinite potentiality and variation quite baffling to the reasoning intelligence; for the reason deals successfully only with the settled and the finite.*

- Sri Aurobindo (*The Human Cycle*, CWSA Vol. 25, p. 112)



*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](mailto:callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in).*

## **India as the Vishwa Guru**

*M says that Sri Aurobindo had said that India's destiny is to be the Vishwa Guru. He wants to know when that will happen.*

Answer:

Sri Aurobindo has indicated at many places that India's destiny is to be the Guru to the world (Vishwa Guru). In *The Human Cycle* also he has said that after the possibilities of reason as a potential solution to misery and suffering have been exhausted, the West will enter the subjective supra-rational age, and would then look at the ancient Indian wisdom. The answer to the question when that will happen would be that India taking on the role of the Vishwa Guru is a process, not an event. It will not happen with a declaration that India has been appointed the Vishwa Guru. So far as the process of India becoming the Vishwa Guru is concerned, the process began quite some time back. A landmark in the process was Swami Vivekananda's address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. It was because the West had by then become reasonably receptive to ancient Indian wisdom that his address was received so well that he ended up staying a few more years in the US and the UK before returning to India. In the West, the thirst for ancient Indian wisdom has since then been growing exponentially. However, it may be pointed out that India being the Vishwa Guru is not the same as Indians of today being Vishwa Gurus. Instead of going into a self-congratulatory mode, what we need to do is to look within and ask ourselves how far we are living our own timeless wisdom.



## Feedback and Encouraging Words

### Feedback from a Mirambika Teacher

Dear Tara didi,

I want to express my sincere gratitude to The Mother & Sri Aurobindo and to you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the ashram since 2019. This place has given me a chance to know myself deeply. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to improve my skills as while teaching in Mirambika Free Progress School. This has provided me an exposure to all aspects of life, and a chance to purify my being and to learn the essential skills for becoming a good teacher .

I learnt so much about physical training, both practical exercises and the words of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo on physical training. I can see the difference in my physicality compared to 2019 when I had just come. I would have never got this exposure anywhere else, in any other organisation. For that I am truly thankful to you.

I have learnt to identify challenges in my personality. I have learnt to identify my inner strengths and weaknesses. My strengths were further enhanced, and I learnt to identify my weakness, and how to overcome them, which I think are essential for a teacher to know and work on.

As part of reflection classes, I have had meditation sessions and reading books of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. I have tried to learn more about the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and their integral yoga. I will continue to develop more and practice in my daily life also in all possible ways and apply.

Working with children is a great learning experience. Whatever I have learnt here, I will try to apply in our school in Karnataka, and also share with our village children.

*Pratibha (Joshi)*

*(in an email dated 22 March 2022)*





## Feedback on the YES talk by Dr. David Marshak

Beautiful explanation on generation gap. Thank you so much for this wonderful session.

*Amrita Dasgupta*

*(Comment in the chat)*

Thank you for lovely example's and very interesting session.

*Rachna Gupta*

*(Comment in the chat)*

Thank you so much for great examples indeed!

*Mukund Kajale*

*(Comment in the chat)*

Very insightful share. So nice to know about so many youth undertaking wonderful initiatives to make this universe a better place.

Thank you YES team. Hope to have more such thought provoking sessions,

*Preeti Bhardwaj*

*(comment on YouTube dated 26 March 2022)*

Wonderful YES Talk! Very grateful for to be able to see it.

*Karen Hamdon*

*(comment on YouTube dated 2 April 2022)*

The talk by Dr. David Marshak titled 'Greta Thunberg Is Not the Only Youth Creating the Future' is available on YouTube.

The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwKeOhhKk1A>



## Feedback on the Orientation to Integral Yoga, 2-3 April 2022

I appreciated an opportunity to take part in the asanas and enjoyed gentle movements of the body. The lecture on Integral Yoga was very informative and helped me to expand my understanding of yoga.

*Ewa Drobnica*

I found the time spent at Ashram yesterday very comforting. I am happy I was there. Thank you for everything.

*Rasa (Nayyar)*

*(in an e-mail dated 3 April 2022)*

Dear Dr Bijlani,

Many Thanks for guiding us through the Yoga Orientation programme. The programme was highly refreshing and invigorating for both the body and mind. I would be grateful if you could mail to me the lifestyle questionnaire administered today, as I would like to use it for my office staff. Alternatively, we could even invite you to our office sometime (or bring the staff to the Ashram as per your convenience, or both) for initiating the PRCL staff to Integral Yoga!

*Sanjiv Garg*

*(received in an email dated 3 April 2022)*

## Feedback on the online course YES.01

I really enjoyed the last series. Loved the format and the content was stellar! It was wonderful to know I was tuning in with so many from around the world too.

*Karen (Hamdon)*

*Canada*

*(in an e-mail dated 23 March 2022)*



## Feedback on the YES talk by Dr. Bhaswati Bhattacharya

Very interesting talk. I have realized that people working in fields such as Yoga and other traditional knowledge systems often struggle to publish their work. But here is a wonderful attempt by Dr. Bhaswati Bhattacharya to bring both traditional and modern scientific knowledge on an even level – a beginning which will pave the way for unearthing other secrets lost to us for centuries.

*Hemamalini R.*

*(Comment dated 3 April 2022 on YouTube)*

The talk by Dr. Bhaswati Bhattacharya titled 'Bridging Ancient and Modern Healing with Ayurveda' is available on YouTube.

The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNqzBS0efa0>

## Feedback from a visitor to Auro-Mira Vidya Mandir, Kechla, Odisha

Dear Tara Didi / Pranjal

We wish to thank you again for the opportunity that you gave us in being an accomplice in Kechla. We thoroughly enjoyed every bit and our interactions with your teaching team and students were very enriching.

Pranjal, you gave a new meaning to Bhakti Yoga practice – service to mankind is service to God. My salutes to you. You have done an extraordinary service to humanity.

*Sudipta Das*

*(in an email dated 2 April 2022)*



## Forthcoming Events

*Saturday, 16 April 2022*

7 pm	Bhajan Sandhya by Ms. Sapna Mukjherjee	Meditation Hall
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*Sunday, 24 April 2022*

*Darshan Day (Anniversary of The Mother's Final Arrival in Pondicherry on 24 April 1920)*

7 am	Invocation by Srila Didi	Meditation Hall
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10 am	Satsang Simple Advice Is Not Easy to Act Upon' (Based on The Mother's Advice to spiritual seekers) A talk by Ramesh Bijlani	Meditation Hall
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Musical offering: Premsheela

6.15 pm	Marchpast	Shrine Lawns
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6.45 pm	Musical offering by Ashram choir Reading on the significance of the day: Tara Didi	Meditation Hall
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*Monday, 25 April 2022*

6.45 pm	Felicitation of Tara Didi by Integral Association, Kolkata Musical offering	Meditation Hall
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## Contact us

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

For a free subscription to '*Sri Aravind Karmadhara*', please send an e-mail to [sakarmdhara@gmail.com](mailto:sakarmdhara@gmail.com)

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

To learn about the recent and forthcoming activities through the Ashram's e-magazine, '*Realization*', send an email to: [callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in](mailto:callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in)

Please follow a simple two-step process:

1. Subject: *Subscribe*
2. Click on *Send*

If you subscribe either to '*Realization*', or to '*The Call Beyond*', you will start receiving, month after month, both the magazines.

For information about Auro-Mira Service Society and the Kechla project, please visit the website [www.auromira.in](http://www.auromira.in)



## Note

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



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

**Our website:** [www.sriurobindoashram.net](http://www.sriurobindoashram.net)

**YouTube:** <https://youtube.com/sriurobindoashramdelhibranch>

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**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/sriurobindoashramdelhibranch>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/saadelhibranch>



## Feedback

Please send your feedback to  
[callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in](mailto:callbeyond@aurobindoonline.in)

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