

THE CALL BEYOND

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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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Highlights

- *Remembering Karuna Didi: Page 4*
- *Integral Yoga at Work: Page 21*
- *Nurturing the aspiration: Page 26*

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Contents

guest editorial

- *The Voyager of a Divine Lyric* 4

article

- *Socio-Cultural Impact of Globalisation* 12

hundred years ago

- *The Synthesis of Yoga* 15

twenty five years ago

- *The Problem of Human Unity* 19

book review

- *Integral Yoga at Work* 21

poetry

- *Abou Ben Adhem* 24

tip of the month

- *The Mother's Prayer* 25

may i help you

- *Questions & Answers* 26

appreciations

- *Feedbacks from Visitors* 28

notice board

- *Contact us* 35

The Voyager of a Divine Lyric

(a birthday tribute to Sri Karunamayee)

By Jayanthi Ramachandran

Karunamayee Abrol, otherwise fondly known as Karuna didi by all her near and dear ones, was born on 24 March 1930. Her's was a family of artists and musicians who were intimately involved in a movement of music associated with the invoking of the spiritual treasures of the nation. Karuna didi also bloomed and blossomed, since childhood, in an atmosphere steeped in the ideals and practices of nationalism. She inherited the Kshatriya spirit from her paternal lineage and the spirit of the *Arya Samaj*, fiercely committed to nationalism, from her maternal lineage.

Her grandfather, heeding the call for non-cooperation, relinquished his association with British schools as school inspector and founded the National School in Lahore as well as Sri Ram Ashram School in Amritsar. This was his service to his motherland. It was her grandfather who first embraced Arya Samaj and strived towards the source of Indian Culture through the Vedas. Her mother grew in and



inherited this outlook. This reformist tendency was also prominent in her own father and thus formed the distinctive ethos of the family. The entire family embraced the khadi movement, which explains Karuna didi's preference for a certain kind of attire.

Her father was an unusual child in his own family. At the age of 10 or 11, he declared to the Kshatriya family that he would not eat meat. As a result of this conviction, he had to leave his house and learnt how to live an independent life. His destiny took him to Delhi. He heeded the Gandhian call and managed to influence his own father, later on, in embracing tenets of the movement. Her father, her maternal uncle and Chacha-ji (founder of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch), being youngsters at that time, rallied around to realise the nationalistic course led by various leaders, including spiritual leaders, Swami Shraddhananda and Hazrat Inayat Khan. They were one in their aspiration to create a classless, free society with good education.

Karuna didi grew up in a wall-less home, into which anyone was welcome. It was “like an ashram”. Not only did her father support his own large family of eight children, he was also supporting the children of his associates. The children, including Karuna didi, lived in an environment that ardently worshipped the motherland and yearned for her freedom. She speaks of her little brother who went to school insisting that his shirt buttons remain unbuttoned so that the bullets from the revolvers and rifles of the enemies of his motherland may pierce straight through his chest into his heart.

Karuna didi’s early life speaks of a strong Gandhian contact and influence. Gandhiji’s prayer meetings, whenever he was in Delhi, was a treasured occasion for the family, for they would all be present for the evening prayers. Karuna didi herself sang at the age of 15 with her sister before Gandhiji in the Ramlila grounds in 1945.

Music had been a very significant presence in Karunadidi’s life. Here is what she says about the presence of music in her life:

‘There were good teachers coming to teach music to my elder brother and sister. We were a musical family. Music was always there. Music was my confidante, my constant companion, early. I did not have a systematic education in Sanskrit, but our family atmosphere was always resounding with Vedic mantras, sandhya and havan mantras. In my childhood for years, it was our daily routine. We didn’t know the meaning, but every child chanted. My father had a great love for music, so he would sing these mantras in the ragas and you would follow, because the words were known and a melody you can always follow. By singing, every time, something would be awakened and opened.’ (Cynthia Snodgrass, in ‘The Sounds of Satyagraha: Mahatma Gandhi’s use of Sung-Prayers and Ritual’)

Karuna didi had a very special inclination and instinct towards music from a very young age. She was found composing and teaching music to children from her neighbourhood since she was 5 years old. She consciously chose the path of music for her self-realisation at the tender age of 12 after a significant spiritual experience. At the age of 13, didi attended formal musical training with Pandit Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, Principal and Founder of the Gandharva Mahavidhalaya in New Delhi. KarunaDidi completed a 6-year course in a couple of years and received her first degree in music before even completing her secondary education. In later years, Karunadidi was recognized for her very exceptional talent in music. She was an A class artist with the All India Radio.

In 1952, at the age of 22, didi acquired her Masters in Philosophy. Even then, her quest to embrace a spiritual life was very alive. She sought for a guide who would integrate the worlds of music and spirituality in her life. The following year, she found her hearts quest fulfilled in

Pandit PranNath-ji, descendent of an unrivalled lineage of great musicians. Pandit PranNath-ji, a vocalist of the Kirana Gharana, invoked the Rag Miyan-Ki-Malhar at a concert of the Khadi Gramudyog Music Conference. Karuna didi was present in this concert. During his rendition, didi knew in her heart that she had found the one who would guide her in her quest. It is also notable that following this particular rendition, the rains did come down. She learned the intricacies of spiritual music under Pandit PranNath-ji till 1965. In the meanwhile, Karuna di had acquired her Masters in Music and also assumed headship of the music department of Vidyavati Mukunda Girls' College in Ghaziabad. In 1966, she relinquished her duties in this school because the next chapter of her life was unfolding.

Dada-ji or Daya Shankar Mishra-ji, her mentor and spiritual guide, had once told her that her future destiny would be in Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. One fateful day, the 20th of March 1966, she found herself diverted by destiny from the routine of a common journey. She arrived in Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch answering an inner call. There she met her father's long-time friend, *Chacha-ji*, and offered to sing a *bhajan*. *Chacha-ji* relented after some resistance. She had not brought any song. She was handed a copy of *Arpan Gaan*. She opened the book, and the page having the lyrics of *Kusuma Kali sa mera manas* was the first one to open. On the spot, she composed the music and sang it. Her fate was sealed, at least at the human level. She brought tears to the eyes of all the listeners gathered in the drawing room. Those present with her realized that a gem of a person had walked into the portals of the ashram. Heeding the request of *Chacha-ji*, Karuna didi joined the ashram and sang only for *ashramites* and devotees in the meditation hall during the daily satsang and also for any

special occasion observed by the ashram. She dedicated her life to *sadhana* in the ashram, and that too not only through music. Her life's quest, it seemed, was seeking its fulfillment from that juncture onwards. In ashram, she took up various other duties of tending to children in school, as a warden in the school's hostel and serving food to the children. The experiences she had in the ashram led to her gradual transformation and progress in her spiritual life.

In 1967, with The Mother's blessings, Karuna didi started the Matri Kala Mandir, faithfully committed to realizing, both in the music she practiced and in the organization that she led, the one-word prayer that The Mother offered to the institute, "*Harmony*". The Mother herself appointed Karuna didi as the Director and Principal of the institute. Karuna didi faithfully served the institute for the next 50 years, till her last day on earth.

Twenty years after Matri Kala Mandir's inauguration, the doors to another adventure opened before her. Shyam Bhatnagar, an associate of Pandit Pran Nath-ji and Karuna didi laid the foundation for didi's first trip to the USA. It was in the spring of 1987 that the Nightingale from 'Bharat' first showered her strains of divine music in the hall of Hare Krishna Temple in Berkeley, California for an hour and a half, keeping one and all enthralled. It was here that Joan Allekotte, *Guru Behn* and future *shishya* of Karuna didi not only heard her, but also watched her. In contrast to her guru Pandit Pran Nath-ji, who emanates stillness and austerity as he invokes the Divine through music, Karuna didi, was the moving image of one who was immersed in the music from within and who at the same time, poured out the expression of that inner experience in the outer form. Her face, her whole body was an expression of what she sang. Joan ardently

aspired to learn from Karuna didi about the hidden secrets of music. Following this encounter, Joan and her husband, Steve Allekotte visited Delhi ashram in the fall of the same year. They met Karuna didi and invited her to make her presence felt regularly in the USA so that the treasure of 'Bharat' could be shared with brothers and sisters across the globe too. This proposition found its fruition in 1990, when didi made a yearly trip across the Atlantic for the next three years. Then from 1994 onwards, she made two yearly trips to the USA, once in Spring, for about 6 weeks and once in Fall for about 8 weeks. According to Karuna didi, the trip to the USA was welcomed, for it helped in her sadhana and spiritual growth. She believed that she had come to be connected with America only because of the will of her Gurus, The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Karuna didi brought with her to the west the Universal Spiritual aspect of music. Karuna didi was well taken by the people she met there as she could articulate clearly the music she brought to the new world and the tradition and culture that came with it and the deep spiritual quest embedded in each song. Her spiritual and philosophical archive was immense and helped her in conveying the depth and vastness of Indian spirituality. She became quite a part of the local community through her association with the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco and the *Sur Laya Sangam* and came to know many people intimately. Her arrival was much awaited each spring and fall, recalls Joan Allekotte. She changed many people's lives, including Joan's. Karuna didi made her last trip to the USA in October 2016.

Joan recalls fondly Karuna didi's trip to the USA in the year 2014 to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of *Sur Laya Sangam*. Didi's arrival was a special moment for everyone there. Didi was very careful about keeping away from limelight,

but limelight nevertheless found her, and she was promptly felicitated after the offering of music.

Back in the ashram, didi's arrival from her trips to the USA was much awaited. Missed was the voice of the Nightingale who called out to the Divine so ardently. So Soul-stirring was her rendition that there can be not a single person who had listened to Karuna didi's live music who would have not had tears in the eyes after an invocation, or a peaceful joy, pure and sturdy, dancing around in the heart space for more of the same. Music was one large part of Karuna didi. We all knew that she was a true *Sadhak*. She took every work given to her seriously and completed them sincerely and with the simplicity of a child. She was also single-minded in her pursuit. Her child-like fervour and enthusiasm were infectious and moving. The joy and vigor with which she received and later rode on her tricycle was enough to make one resolve to do away with all of one's *tamas*. Her child-like laughter triggered trickles of laughter in every heart. The warm clutch of the hands when greeting brought warmth to the heart and each rare hug gave renewed strength to one's pursuit of one's life's aim.

Karuna didi was truly an exceptional soul who graced all of us while on this earth. It has been a great privilege for all ashramites to have shared this abode with her, no matter for how long. She believed that life full of music was a living sadhana. In that spirit she showered us all with the rain of divine nectar and we all benefited from that rain of delight for as much and as long as we could receive it. Co-incident or not, Karuna didi's long-time association with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch started with *Kusum kalisa mera manas*. This song was also the one that she sang in the ashram meditation hall for the last time, three days before

she left this world. It was also significant that her soul chose to leave the earth on an auspicious day, India's Republic Day, 26 January 2017, which was also her father's birth anniversary. Her long time constant companion, Rangamma didi was with her at that time. The last words that she uttered were addressed to Rangamma didi: "*Himmat rakho!*" (Don't lose courage). She has indeed left all of us richer for what we received from her in many ways. The living power of what we have received from her can only be fathomed by each one of us in the secret cave of our heart.

My gratitude goes to Rangamma didi, Joan Allekotte, Tara didi and others for sharing their fond memories of Karunadidi.

I just got word of Sri Karunamayee's passing. I was very fond of her. From the moment I met her, she welcomed me like a Grandmother. Listening to her music in the beautiful Delhi Ashram always brought me to tears as I felt it was a spiritual vehicle to become closer to our Beloveds. I would be honored to attend the Memorial on June 10th.

With Love and gratitude,

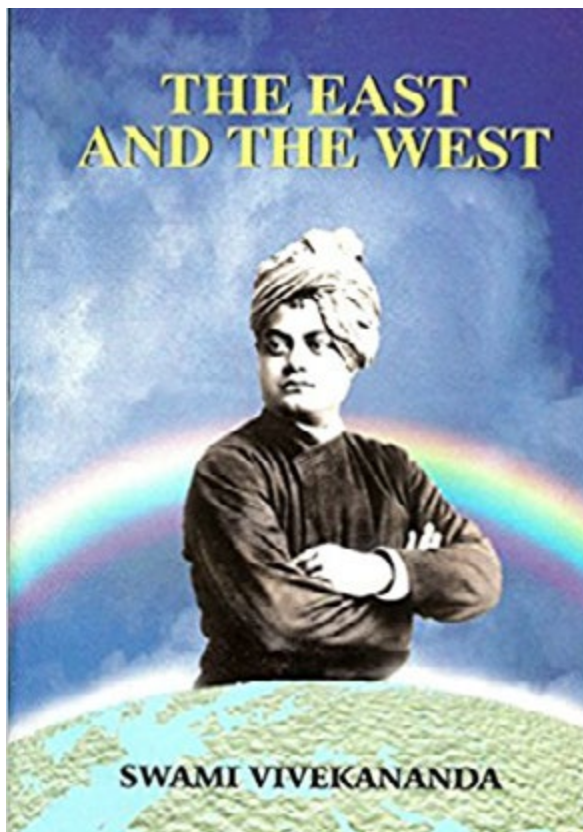
Jennifer Louise Dunning
*(in an e-mail to Sur Laya Sangam,
California, USA, on 27 April 2017)*

Socio-Cultural Impact of Globalisation

Shweta Verma

There is no doubt that economic development led by technological innovation has benefited India in several ways by bringing us closer to the global environment. It has given us more opportunities to learn and grow; provided us access to a whole world of information and knowledge that we can use to our advantage. But this global revolution and barrage of new ideas has also created a sort of socio-cultural confusion that is affecting the core of the Indian society.

Besides the changing nature of social interactions and relationships, the free flow of information across boundaries has increased our exposure to other cultures and societies. While the West is getting attracted to Eastern



ideas of spirituality, yoga and inner contentment, the East is fascinated by the materialistic achievements and development of the Western world. This throws up the possibility of an interesting amalgamation of cultures, with each learning and acquiring the good aspects of the other. Swami Vivekananda, in his book 'East and West' has talked about integration of spirituality and materialism. "The ideal society would

be the one in which would be synthesised the Indian idea of spiritual integrity and the western idea of social progress,” he says. However, such a mature approach to social and cultural integration may not be easy to achieve in practice.

The current progressive thinking of the West has certainly helped reduce our rigidities and eased certain conservative and static social norms that were regressive and detrimental to the development of the society. But, at the same time, it has also increased our focus on materialism, making us increasingly individualistic like the West. Placing ‘self’ over others or giving more importance to personal gratification instead of societal benefits has led to a kind of social unrest and discontent. The glamour and glitter of materialistic success seems to be overshadowing our core Indian values of social goodness, deep thinking, spirituality and meditateness. Sri Aurobindo emphasises the need to preserve this ‘spirit’ of Indian culture. In his essay on ‘Indian Culture and External Influence,’ he talks about enriching our culture by accepting positive western influences, without losing our originality. He says:

“When I speak of acceptance and assimilation, I am thinking of certain influences, ideas, energies (from Europe)... which can awaken and enrich our own cultural activities and cultural being if we succeed in dealing with them with a victorious power and originality... That was in fact what our own ancestors did, never losing their originality, never effacing their uniqueness... (otherwise) we shall get too its social discords and moral plagues and cruel problems, and I do not see how we shall avoid becoming the slaves of the economic aim in life and losing the spiritual principle of our culture.”

Social Evolution amidst Chaos

Amidst all the chaos and conflicting influences, as the society continues to evolve, we need to preserve the original spirit and soul of Indian culture. This does not mean that we should not embrace the new developments around us. New innovations and learning can be judiciously deployed to enhance our existing philosophical, artistic, cultural and social environment. At the same time, it is important to retain the remarkable power, energy and vitality of India.

Sri Aurobindo, in his writings on 'Indian Culture and External Influence' has also talked about acceptance and assimilation of modern ideas and knowledge that is compatible with Indian spirit and ideals. He has warned against blind imitation and senseless adoption of ideas that are against India's social and cultural ethos. If Indian society has to rise to higher level of consciousness, we need to preserve India's spiritual ideals and unique identity. Only a spiritualised society can bring about true harmony and happiness. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

"Confronted with the huge rush of modern life and thought, invaded by another dominant civilisation almost her opposite or inspired at least with a very different spirit to her own, India can only survive by confronting this raw, new, aggressive, powerful world with fresh diviner creations of her own spirit, cast in the mould of her own spiritual ideals"



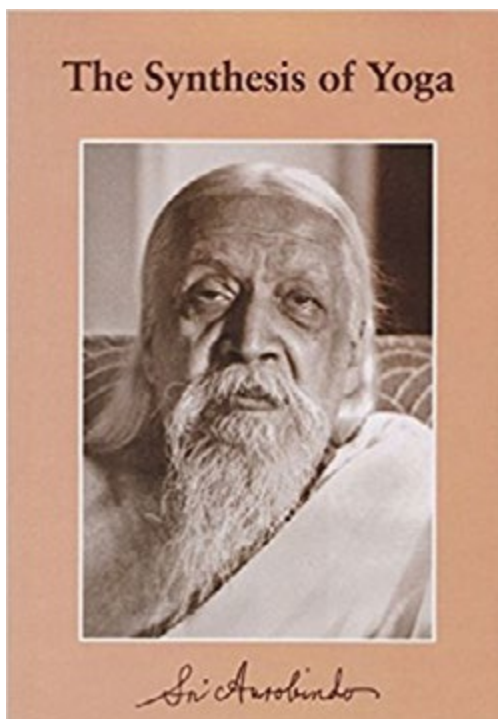
The Synthesis of Yoga

Rajayoga

As the body and the Prana are the key of all the closed doors of the Yoga for the Hathayogin so is the mind the key in Rajayoga. In both systems the practice of Asana and Pranayama is included; but in the one they occupy the whole field, in the other each is limited only to one simple process and in their unison they are intended to serve only a limited and intermediate office.

In the subtle energy body the pranic energy is directed through a system of numerous channels, called *nadi*, which are gathered up into seven centres called *chakra*, and which rise into an ascending scale to the summit where there is the thousand-petalled lotus from which all the mental and vital energy flows.

This arrangement of the psychic body is reproduced in the physical with the spinal column as a rod and the ganglionic centres as the chakras which rise up from the bottom of the column, where the lowest is attached, to the brain and find their summit in the *brahmarandhra* at the top of the skull.



The whole energy of the soul is not at play in the physical body and life, the secret powers of mind are not awake in it, the bodily and nervous energy

predominate. But all the while the supreme energy is there, asleep; it is said to be coiled up and slumbering like a snake, – therefore it is called the *Kundalini Shakti*, – in the lowest of the chakras, in the *muladhara*. When by *pranayama* the division between the upper and the lower *prana* currents in the body is dissolved, this *Kundalini* is struck and awakened, it uncoils itself and begins to rise upward like a fiery serpent breaking open each lotus as it ascends until the *Shakti* meets the *Purusha* in the *brahma-randhra* in a deep *Samadhi* of union.

Finally, at the summit of the ascension, this rising and expanding energy meets with the superconscious self which sits concealed behind and above our physical and mental existence; this meeting leads to a profound *Samadhi* of union in which our waking consciousness loses itself in the superconscious. The secret power of *Mantras*, *Chakras* and *Kundalini Shakti* is one of the central truths of the psychophysical science and core of the *Tantric* philosophy.

Rajayoga does not start with *Asana* and *Pranayama*, but insists first on a moral purification of the mentality. This moral purification is divided in the established system under two heads, five *yamas* and five *niyamas*. *Yama* is any self-discipline by which the *rajasic* egoism and its passions and desires in the human being are conquered and quieted into perfect cessation. The object is to create a moral calm, a void of the passions, and so prepare for the death of egoism in the *rajasic* human being. The *niyamas* are equally a discipline of the mind by regular practices of which the highest is meditation on the divine Being, and their object is to create a *sattwic* calm, purity and preparation for concentration upon which the secure pursuance of the rest of the *Yoga* can be founded.

The Rajayogic Pranayama purifies and clears the nervous system; it enables us to circulate the vital energy equally through the body and direct it where needed and thus enables to maintain a perfect health and soundness of the body and the vital being. It opens entirely the six centres of the psycho-physical system and brings into the waking consciousness the power of the awakened Shakti and the light of the unveiled Purusha on each of the ascending planes. Coupled with the use of mantra it brings the divine energy into the body and prepares for and facilitates that concentration in Samadhi which is the crown of the Rajayogic method.

Rajayogic concentration is divided into four stages; it commences with the drawing both of the mind and senses from outward things, proceeds to the holding of the one object of concentration to the exclusion of all other ideas and mental activities, then to the prolonged absorption of the mind in this object, finally, to the complete ingoing of the consciousness by which it is lost to all outward mental activity in the oneness of Samadhi. By this concentration, the mind enters from the idea of the Divine into its reality, into which it sinks silent, absorbed, unified.

Rajayoga is a psychic science and it includes the attainment of all the higher states of consciousness and their powers



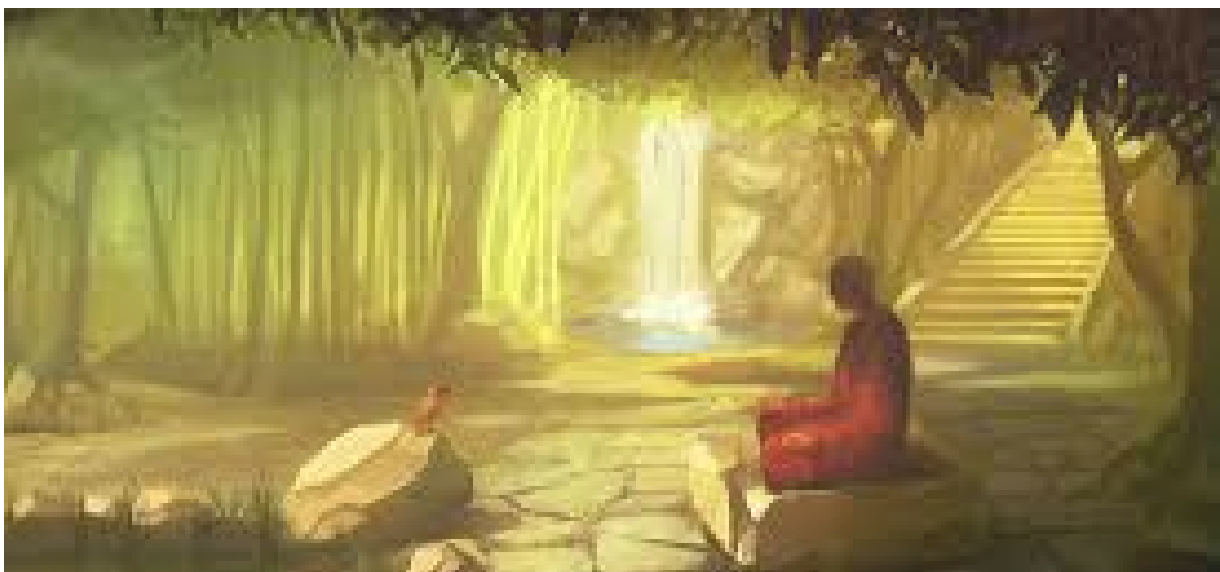
by which the mental being rises towards the superconscious as well as its ultimate and supreme possibility of union with the Highest. The Yogin, while in the body, is not always mentally inactive

and sunk in Samadhi, and an account of the powers and states which are possible to him on the higher planes of his being is necessary to the completeness of the science.

These powers and experiences belong, first, to the vital and mental planes above this physical in which we live, and are natural to the soul in the subtle body; as the dependence on the physical body decreases, these abnormal activities become possible and even manifest themselves without being sought for. Secondly, there are greater powers belonging to the supramental planes which are the very powers of the Divine and cannot be acquired by personal effort but can only come from above, or else can become natural to the man if and when he ascends beyond mind and lives in the spiritual being, power, consciousness and ideation.

For an integral Yoga the special methods of Rajayoga and Hathayoga may be useful at times in certain stages of the progress, but the methods of integral Yoga must be mainly spiritual, and dependence on physical methods or fixed psychic or psycho-physical processes on a large scale would be the substitution of a lower for a higher action.

Sri Aurobindo (In the Arya, Vol. 4, No.8, 15 March 1918)



The Problem of Human Unity

Professor M. V. Nadkarni

It is interesting that through diametrically opposed political and economic systems the votaries of Capitalism and Communism have derived strikingly similar outcomes. This is because the inner limits to the consciousness of both the groups were very similar. Whether you live under a capitalist dispensation or a communist dispensation so long as dimensions of your inner consciousness are the same, you reap from life a similar harvest of frustration and despair.

The world is realizing more and more that there is no rationality in pursuing political goals with military means. The cost of a war always exceeds the benefits. This does not mean that power politics has beaten a retreat. No, it has only changed its preference for what weapons to use. The use of violence for political purposes has now spread to non-state actors. The easy availability of weapons has made

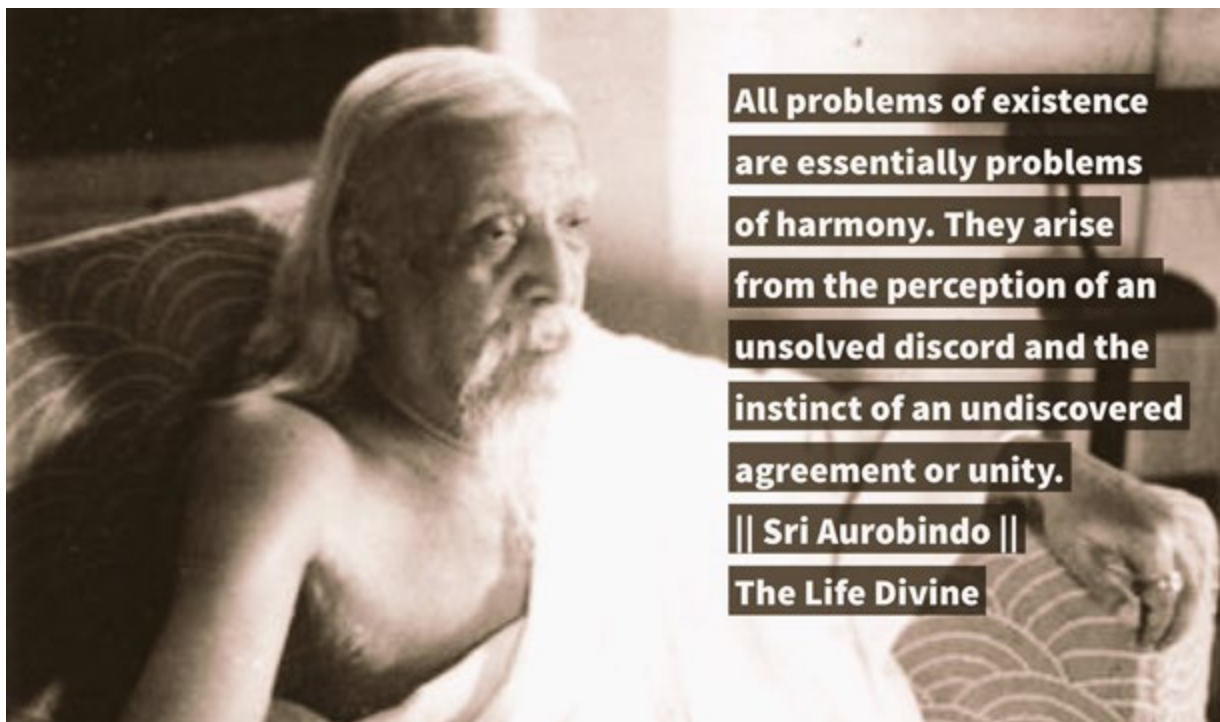


it easy for groups who have scores to settle. Consequently political violence has become a major problem and seeks to achieve its political objectives by threatening, terrifying and killing innocent people. The hostage-taking, hijackings, bomb attacks and direct murders it uses as its

strategies make it as monstrous as war. So once again we see a world facing tensions different in their outer form but all arising out of the same kind of inner inadequacy of mankind.

This then is the crucial problem. How to bring about 'a total reformation of man' 'from the depths of consciousness' not just of a few people but of a majority of people everywhere? For this world to be a happier place, man has to change from within. Most thinkers have come to this conclusion. But then what would this inner change involve and how to bring it about? These are questions most of these thinkers leave either unanswered or answer vaguely, while Sri Aurobindo is the one thinker who provides a comprehensive answer to all these questions.

(Excerpted from The Call Beyond, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 10 and No. 3, p. 21, 1993)



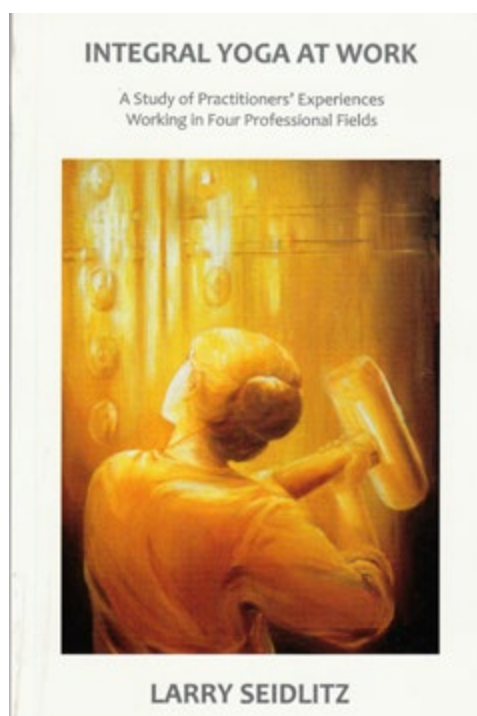
Integral Yoga at Work: A Study of Practitioners' Experiences Working in Four Professional Fields.

By Larry Seidlitz, Indian Psychology Institute, Puducherry, 2016, pp. 181 Rs. 250. ISBN 978-81-86413-59-3

In this way of doing and seeing all works and all life become only a daily dynamic worship and service of the Divine in the unbounded temple of his own vast cosmic existence.

-Sri Aurobindo

Larry Seidlitz has a Ph.D. in Psychology and has worked as a researcher in a medical school and a psychiatry hospital in the USA. He has been a practitioner of Integral Yoga in various forms and intensities for the last four decades. He has lived and worked at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham at Lodi, California, USA, and has spent a decade at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry. He currently resides at Auroville.



As the title suggests, the book aims to present a study done by the author to see how the principles and guidelines of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga are being put into practice by individuals in their professional lives. The author has summarized his reason for undertaking such a study in the following words: *"I feel that Integral Yoga is all about expressing the Divine in life, and life, for the most part is work."*

The author interviewed 16 individuals, most of them living either in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry or at Auroville; those not living there had an intimate association with these places. These practitioners belong to four professional fields— management, education, health care and art.

The author starts by giving a concise and clear introduction to the basic principles of Integral Yoga and its creators, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

In his research, the author discovered nine themes, beliefs, or attitudes that were common to most of the practitioners of Integral Yoga. *These nine attitudes or beliefs were: Merging of life, work and yoga; Equality towards money; Service as a motivation in work; Feeling the Divine's Presence in work; Feeling that one is an instrument of the Divine; Feeling connected with the Divine leads to harmony and efficiency in work; Receiving concrete help from the Divine in work; Difficulties in work seen as part of the Yoga; and Feeling the Divine's presence during work.* One often thinks of a few of these themes at a time, but to have all nine at one place is a significant achievement of the research, and has been possible because 16 different devotees have volunteered what is uppermost in their minds while going about their work.

In the next four chapters, the author has then dealt with the four fields—management, education, health care and art. Each chapter starts out by mentioning Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's guidelines relating to that particular field, followed by the interviews with professionals about their experience in bringing Yoga into their work. The chapters end with the author drawing connections between the experiences of interviewees and the principles of Integral Yoga.

The interviews give beautiful glimpses into the way these individuals bring spiritual orientation to their everyday jobs and businesses, and the struggle involved in actually implementing the philosophy. The practitioners of yoga also talk about the pitfalls and ultimately the rewards of bringing Integral Yoga into their work. They talk about the ease of finding solutions to problems and navigating hurdles, the intuitive ways of working that are eventually beneficial, the attitude towards superiors and subordinates, the feelings of service and trusteeship, and being an instrument instead of having the pride of being an owner and executor.

The last chapter sums up the research findings and also the author's own reflections on those. He also warns the reader of the subjective nature of such studies and his own influences based on his personal understanding of Integral Yoga. It may be so but there is still much to be taken away from the reading.

Reconciling one's inner journey with the life and work one has to do in the outer world can be hard. Embarking on the spiritual path often coincides with losing material ambition. It can leave one feeling lost, purposeless and demotivated in outer work. But the path of Integral Yoga is not one of renunciation – Karma is an important part of the devotees' life. In fact, it is while fulfilling the responsibilities of life and work that one gets ample opportunities for spiritual growth.

The book presents the principles of Integral Yoga very simply and in relatable doses. It leaves one with practical ways to implement yoga in one's own work. All in all, the book can be a good guide to those starting on the path, and reassuring for those already on it.

By Bhavna Dewan Bhatia

About Ben Adhem

By Leigh Hunt

*About Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold: —
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
“What writest thou?” — The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, “I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.”*

*The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.*

The Mother's Prayer

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

One of The Mother's prayers reads:

"Grant that I may do as well as I can the best thing to do".

This is a very short, and yet a very insightful prayer. It has two components, both very important: how to do the work, and what work to do. Doing what one does as well as one can is important, even if the outcome is not in our own hands. This is so because as an instrument of the Divine, the work has to be offered to the Divine. To be fit to be offered, it should be done as well as one can. But what is it that one should do as well as one can. The Mother says, "the best thing to do" – an answer so short, and yet perfect. How do we know what is the best thing to do? It is our own psychic being that tells us the best thing to do. The inner voice emanating from our deepest Self provides quick and clear guidance regarding what the best thing to do is in a particular situation.



Questions & Answers

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.



DG wants to know:

How can the aspiration be nurtured?

That is an important question because the spiritual path has its own disappointments and difficulties which may weaken the aspiration. A few things that make the aspiration persistent and perseverant are:

- Negative factors: Disappointments, losses, setbacks and failures in worldly life reinforce the knowledge, which the seeker already has, that wealth, fame, power, prestige, and relationships cannot last, might be lost suddenly, and are incapable of providing lasting security, happiness or protection. That makes the seeker *aspire* for a deeper relationship with the Divine, who never deserts us and is everlasting.
- Positive factors: The peace of mind, deeper insight into life, and fulfillment that are the rewards of walking even part of the way on the spiritual path encourage the seeker to *aspire* for further progress.
- While on the spiritual path, the realization that there is still a long way to go intensifies the *aspiration*.

The above list is by no means exhaustive. The beginning of walking the spiritual path consciously is invariably a sincere and intense aspiration. Some of the above factors nurture the aspiration and make it steady, vigilant, persistent and perseverant. But the aspiration should be calm; it should never become impatient.



Feedbacks from Visitors

A Day at Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch

It was a supposedly hurry burry visit to fulfill a long standing commitment I made to my son who had praised Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch a lot after his school trip there. He narrated so many positive things about this place back home that inquisitiveness overpowered me and here I was standing at the gate of this serene Ashram in the heart of New Delhi. We reached here sometime before tea. As I entered with my two young kids, we were welcomed by some multi coloured garbage bins smiling from a corner. I felt very happy that my first impression was a glimpse of systematic cleansing. This first impression never betrayed us during our entire stay at this Divine abode. To say the least, sustainable environment friendly cleanliness was the hallmark of this place.

Founded in the year 1956, even after so many years, the Ashram upholds its spiritual ideals so well; thanks to the dedicated and self-motivated staff at the Ashram and its inmates. There is an infectious air of self-discipline and divinity to be inhaled here.

After my arrival, going around with my kids I was dead tired, yet I went to the Meditation Hall for the evening meditation. What a favour I did to myself! Not only I came back fresh as an evening primrose growing in the garden there, but a sense of bliss had swept over me.

Dinner is served early in the Ashram at about 7.30 pm. I enjoyed the satvic meal. After finishing the wholesome dinner, and cleaning our utensils ourselves, there was yet another humbling experience. I was glad that my children

were learning the lessons of self-reliance through role models, as all the persons were cleaning their plates themselves.

As I had decided to spend the night with children in the Ashram, I retired to bed early with the children. I woke up to the cackling yet sweet sound of peacocks at 5.30 am. My younger son had already told me of peacocks in the Ashram last evening. However, we had not found any at dusk. As I walked close to the balcony of our room, I saw this creature in its most magnificent avatar frolicking downstairs. I was so excited that I hurried down to have a closer look! I stopped myself a few yards behind as what I was witnessing before me was something I had never ever experienced in my lifetime. The creature had thrown all the splendid feathers open and it was dancing as if nobody was watching it! Ah..ha! I could barely smatter those words in awe. Folding my hands in a prayer, I beheld this mesmerizing scene for a couple of minutes till tears started clouding my eyes. I thought I have



been already rewarded, and shall ask for nothing more from the visit. However, I was wrong. My enthusiasm to explore the Ashram overpowered me. I found volunteers working in the kitchen garden. There were all kinds of fruit trees and medicinal plants growing in it. I chose to pick Jamuns that had fallen on the ground rather than plucking from the low branches of these trees. A value I learnt years back, “Nature has everything to fulfill your need but not greed”. I could observe the same values inculcated here when my children were served less food in the first serving just to avoid wastage of food. The Ashram had its own compost pit, again a well thought-out step in reusing the indigenous waste for in house needs. Throughout my wandering I saw unique ideas implemented for sustainable living which led to an ever-enhancing inner journey in my sub conscious.

The best part was yet to come as we gathered under a banyan tree for the ‘Havan’ at 8 am in the morning. Recital of mantras created an enlightened atmosphere. Next was a yogasana session lined up for us. The next programme under the umbrella of ‘clean mind’ theme for that year in the Ashram was a talk named ‘Opportunity in Adversity’ by a Psychologist who showed us the way to develop rational thinking in whatever circumstances we are in. After this day full of activities my heart filled with ecstasy and contentment, and I thanked myself for deciding to come to the Ashram. We felt that we have taken a step on the long trail of the path shown by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We would like to come again and again to this oasis of knowledge and spirituality as we feel our soul is too parched to be quenched by just one visit.

Mridula Singh

Gurugram

(in a letter dated 15 January 2018)

Feedback from Students of The French Lycee School, London

A group of 13 students from The French Lycee School (British Section), London, led by two teachers, immersed themselves in the Ashram atmosphere on 19 & 20 February 2018.

Dear Ramesh-ji,



Thank you so much for providing my students and I with a wonderfully enlightening and fulfilling two days at Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. The students greatly enjoyed their experiences and the learning curve which you carefully orchestrated for them.

I do think the experience you and the ashram provided was a privilege for them; it gave these teenagers another, more reflective, perspective but also possibly got them to reflect on life's purpose in a new and philosophical way. As students of London's Lycee Francais, they are part of the French education system which is entirely secular; in this way they have absolutely no exposure to either religious or spiritual learning. This is one of the reasons I bring them to India each year; I strongly feel they are even at a disadvantage compared to their English peers. Your talks and the access to (and understanding of) yoga was entirely refreshing for them all.

We found it quite a wrench to leave the tranquility and positivity of the ashram, and hard too to leave India as it has been so cold back here on London: we have had snow for the last week and temperatures below freezing.

Thank you again. I hope as a teacher - and as a school - we can stay in touch.

Best wishes - Om Shanti!

Robert Carr (Teacher)
(in an e-mail dated 4 March 2018)

It was a very enriching and well balanced experience as the students were not only able to listen to Dr Bijlani's talks and explanations but also exposed to practical and physical activity through the yoga sessions and be helpful with the service, doing work in the gardens and kitchen for the Ashram – peaceful and meaningful experience and atmosphere. Thank you for such a special and unique experience for us – teachers and the students. We hope to come back.

Ernestina Meloni (Teacher)

I thought of the ashram as a unique experience which cannot be found anywhere else in the world. This was what I was hoping to live during my time in India.

Tamille Giacomotto

I love the plants and the garden. This is a very calm and peaceful place and I'm glad I came here as it helped me gain an open-mind to Hinduism and the difference between religion and spirituality.

Also, the food is top-notch! See you soon (hopefully)

Rebecca Chagoury

The welcome was very nice when we arrived and I really felt the relaxing and calming environment. The gardens are beautiful and I really liked working with the gardeners and learning their techniques. The yoga sessions were also very relaxing and I really liked learning the way of spirituality.

I really liked my stay here and thank you Dr Bijlani for the interesting talks.

The meditation building is also very nice.

Philippine

My stay at the Ashram was a very nice a unique experience. I enjoyed learning about Hinduism and its spiritual philosophy, Vedanta. I felt very welcomed by staff/ashramites. If I was to come back to India I would not think twice to stay again in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Thank You.

Hugo Glashier

Very enjoyable stay, with welcoming staff and a very kind atmosphere. Dr Bijlani's talks were extremely thought provoking and well prepared. They were very informative. The meditation room was furthermore extremely peaceful and was a great way to end a long day.

Carla Ceeshuie

The ashram was extremely welcoming and I enjoyed helping in the garden. Dr Bijlani's talks were very clear and well explained. Thank You!

Lila Ovington

Very kind and welcoming ashramites with peaceful atmosphere from start. Helpful in immersion in Indian culture; authentic and clam feel with good Indian food. Interesting activities, including the session in the garden and talks we

attended during the day, accompanied by yoga session. Really interesting to get such an insightful lesson in spirituality.

Noah Brooks

It was really insightful. A greater sense of community brought us closer together as a group. Learnt ways of a new mindset and different way of living in addition to learning key life values and spirituality. I really enjoyed my stay here. Thank you for having us.

Lucie Muratas

I very much enjoyed my stay at the Ashram; we were very well looked after and were taught so much. Dr Ramesh Bijlani dedicated some of his time to us and gave us a small insight into spirituality which was both very generous of him and very interesting for us.

Thank you for your generosity.

Olivia Guillot

Very nice community that supports each other, and everyone voluntarily participates in every activity that makes the ashram work, which I find is a good system. A place of peace and respect.

Lina Taylor



Contact us

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

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

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

To learn about the recent and forthcoming activities through the Ashram's e-magazine, *Realization*, send an email to: callbeyond@arobindoonline.in

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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 Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch

Please visit the website www.sriarobindoashram.net

For information about Auro-Mira Service Society and the Kechla project

Please visit the website www.auomira.in

Feedback

Please send your feedback to callbeyond@arobindoonline.in

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