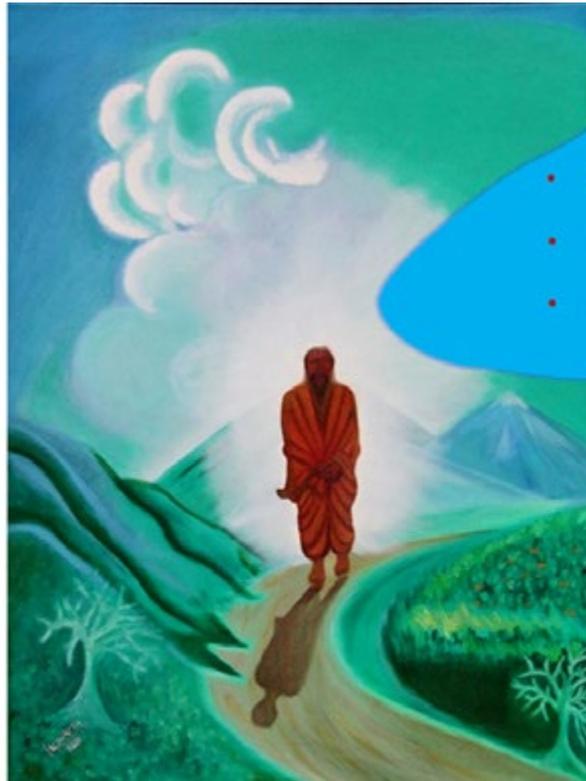


The Call Beyond

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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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Changing the Bus Changed Her Life



The date was March 20 in the year 1966. It was a Sunday, and the morning bright and sunny. Ms. Karuna Abrol, a few days short of 36, got into a bus to visit her music teacher, Pandit Pran Nath, who lived in Kailash Colony, New Delhi. By the time the bus reached Central Secretariat, she got a compelling call from within that told her that she should instead go to meet her father's bosom friend, Shri Surendra Nath Jauhar, whom she knew as Chacha ji (uncle) since her childhood days but had not met for a very long time. She knew that Chacha ji had established the Delhi Branch of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Then she 'saw' on the sunlit bonnet of

the bus a hand crossing her path, as if telling her not to continue in that bus. At the next stop, which was Shah Jehan Road, she got down, and changed two buses to reach Sri Aurobindo Ashram. She reached while the Sunday Satsang was on in the Meditation Hall. As she walked towards the Meditation Hall, she saw the Shrine, and said to herself, "This little monument has left the Taj Mahal far behind". After the Satsang, she walked to the living room with Chacha ji and a few more. There she was in the living room with Chacha ji, the Jauhar family's Master ji (teacher) Shri M.L. Parashar, one of Master ji's students Ms. Indu Bala, and an American friend, Dr. Jay Smith. She asked Chacha ji whether he had recognized her. Of course, he had, he said, but asked her in a complaining tone, where she had been all these days. She used her sense of humour to give the question a twist, and said, "Chacha ji, it is not my fault. The bus brought me here". After 'catching up', and a little chit chat, it was time to leave, but she now got another inner command that told her not to leave before singing a song. So, she said that she would sing a song before leaving. Chacha ji said 'no' because he had no time for such frivolous things. But she insisted. Finally, partly out of politeness, and partly to get rid of her, he agreed. Once she sang, Chacha ji and all the others present in the room had tears in their eyes. They asked for more, and more, and finally it was at least four songs before she was allowed to stop. Next was lunch in the Ashram, and Chacha ji's command that she should stay in the Ashram. That was that, and the 'ghazal queen' became the Mother's musical instrument for more than fifty years till the Mother decided to release her soul for the next leg of its journey.

Sri Karunamayee, popularly called Karuna Didi, left the body on 26 January 2017. For more about her, please see the next two articles, [Melody Merges with The Mother and Revealing Revelations](#).

readers write

Dear Sir,

Thank you so much for the December issue of The Call Beyond. The articles in it are extremely relevant to my situation, and they have also helped illuminate some aspects of it that I am unable to see for myself. I have drawn understanding and solace from them, and I hope that I am able to bring this understanding to the way that I deal with my daily life.

All our best wishes to you for a joyful year filled with peace, good health and happiness.

With love and regards,

Name withheld

(in an e-mail dated 1 Jan 2017)

Melody Merges with the Mother

Devi Sri Karunamayee (24 March 1930 - 26 January 2017)

BALAK RAM



Imagine a girl, all of five years, observing her music teacher teaching her elder sister play the harmonium. One day she starts playing the harmonium herself in another room. The music teacher asks, “Who is this playing the harmonium”? He is told that it is the younger sister. He is angry: “You pay for one child, and actually two are learning. This is cheating”. It was not cheating. The parents had no expectation that the younger one would learn. It is just that the younger one was precocious. Music was in her blood. Their father, Mahashay Krishna Chandra Abrol, was also a musician. And, no doubt, the younger one was specially blessed. The five year old was Karuna, destined to be the Mother’s Melody for more than fifty years.

When Karuna was about ten, she started seeing at home arrive regularly a periodical, Aditi, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. Her father subscribed to it because the Ashram had been established by a close friend of her father, Shri Surendra Nath Jauhar. In Aditi she saw pictures of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and was struck deeply by the beauty and unfathomable depth of Their eyes.

Fast forward to 1966. Karuna now has an M.A. in philosophy from the University of Delhi and a master’s in music from the prestigious Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Mumbai, is an ‘A’ level artiste of the All India Radio, has been called ‘the *ghazal* queen of India’ by the media, still continues to learn music from Pandit Pran Nath ji, a music maestro of the *Kirana gharana*, but is unmarried. On a Sunday morning, she is on her way to meet her guru, but an inner call takes her to Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. By the afternoon, she has been told, rather ordered, by the founder of the Ashram to sing for the Divine, not the radio. She remembers that a yogi, a seer, Sri Daya Shankar Mishra Dada ji, had once told her when he was in a trance-like state that one place where she could evolve was Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Yes, she wants to evolve, and the day to decide has arrived. She says yes, and now the direction of her life has changed.

Within one year of her joining the Ashram, on the Mother’s birthday in 1967 she established Matri Kala Mandir (literally, The Mother’s Temple of Fine Arts), blessed by the Mother with the motto ‘harmony’. Today Matri Kala Mandir is a vibrant place with a large variety of instrumental and vocal music, dances and art being taught there every evening. She ensured in The Mother’s International School an important place for high quality music as a means of approaching the Divine, not for the gifted few but for all the students. In the Ashram, she would be there for the early morning invocation on every special occasion, every evening for the evening meditation, and every Sunday for the Sunday satsang. In the words of Prof. K.R.S. Iyenger, she ‘music-conditioned’ the Ashram and the School. To her, music was not a performance; it was her means of sadhana. In her words, “I have surrendered myself to God with the purpose of being used as a Divine musical instrument. I want to see God in everything. To me life is music, and music is life”.

The founder of the Ashram, popularly called Chacha ji, said, "... it was certainly by the power of the Divine Mother that Karunamayee was brought here, and by her music she enriched the atmosphere of the Ashram and has made the Ashram and the School a paradise of music just like a barren land is turned into a flower garden". In contrast, she herself said, "This (the Ashram) is God's place – I am only like a bird in a flowering mango tree, singing and enjoying the fruits, lost in the fragrance".

Sri Karunamayee completed 50 years in the Ashram on 20 March 2016. Because of her long association with the Ashram and good memory, only she could give first-hand accounts of Acharya Kripalani being a regular visitor to the Ashram, and Udar Pinto making an air-dash from Delhi to Pondicherry simply to fulfill his responsibility of winding the Ashram clocks there. She was looking forward to the golden jubilee of Matri Kala Mandir on 21 February 2017. But before celebrating that milestone, she left the body at 4.30 pm on 26 January 2017, the Republic Day of India, which may be more than a coincidence because apart from everything else that she was, she was also a great patriot. Her rendering of *Vande Mataram* was widely acclaimed, as was her collection of patriotic songs in fourteen Indian languages. When the right time came, the melodious daughter of Mother India merged with the Divine Mother, with a smile that radiated the serenity of surrender to the Supreme on her face.

Sources:

Makarand Paranjape (Editor). *The Spirit's Manifest Home: The Story of Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch.* New Delhi: Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch, second edition, 2003, pp. 145-155.
Rangamma. Personal communication.

Music is a universal language with only seven alphabets. There's nothing like music. It goes directly to the heart even if the words are not understood. I feel, music has the power to transform the world.

– Sri Karunamayee

Revealing Revelations

The different nations, cultures, faiths and peoples are like individual strings of the universal harp. Each string has to be in tune and in unison to make for harmony with the creation and the Creator.

– Sri Karunamayee

All good things in life are appreciated the most when we lose them. It is only after Karuna Didi left the body on 26 January 2017 that so much was learnt about her from so many about the profound way she had touched their hearts, about how much she meant to them, and about her greatness as a human being and her stature as a musician. This article attempts to provide a glimpse of what has been revealed about her within the last few weeks. Although grossly inadequate the attempt is, it may be considered a beginning of the tributes that would continue to be paid to her.

Karuna Didi, the musician

She started at age five with playing the harmonium without being tutored, to which were added the guidance of music maestros like Pandit Pran Nath ji and her intense and prolonged effort and sustained dedication, and above all, the Grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, for whom she sang. The result was a formidable blend, a musical wizard. Pandit Vijay Shankar Mishra ji recollected a day when during a stage rehearsal a day before the event, the harmonium player did not turn up. Karuna Didi offered humbly, "If you allow, may I play the harmonium". Mishra ji recollected how within seconds she matched the song and the table player, something that is normally very difficult.



The many moods of Karuna Didi while singing



Two of Karuna Didi's closest disciples singing with her: Preamsheela (centre) and Srila Basu (right)

Preamsheela recollected how she composed instantly the tune for the song, '*kuchh yaad raahaa, kuchh bhool gayaa*'. Further, she adds Didi was extremely creative. She would change the tune or the raga within seconds. Srila says that Didi was always exploring new paths, new avenues, to express herself, experimenting with new combination of swaras and ragas. A few years ago, on 26th January, she sang 'Bande Mataram' in five different tunes to school children and told them a story about each tune. Further, says Srila, her music was meditative in character. It would sooth the nerves and make the mind calm. A key feature of her music was 'Silence'. Between two pieces there was silence, during which the music just heard would sink in, would permeate the whole being.

Her proficiency had not slowed down her practice. She would sing often without an audience, any time of the day or night, and for hours together. For her, music was not work. It was the essence of her life. She was a complete and perfect musician: a lyricist, a composer, an instrumentalist and a vocalist. If she had followed a different path, she could have easily been rich and famous.

Karuna Didi, the teacher

To be a good teacher, knowing the subject well is necessary but not sufficient. In addition, the teacher should also love the student, love teaching, and should know how to teach. Karuna Didi had all these qualities. Karuna Didi enjoyed teaching, and never discouraged a student. Preamsheela, who met her almost everyday after returning from work says that Didi could tell how you are feeling from the tone of your 'namaste'. And, if the student is feeling low, Didi could lift her mood in no time. When Didi was in the US, she would call Preamsheela every single day, and ask her, not how she was, but rather, what new stuff she had done during the day. No further testimony of her love for the students, and the way she inspired them is necessary. Karuna Didi was the traditional guru, and expected the traditional response from the *shishya*. For Karuna Didi, there were no standard one-hour classes. Preamsheela slept in Didi's room on Saturdays. The teaching sessions would sometimes continue till midnight, and then Didi would wake her up at four in the morning for further practice. According to Srila, her way of teaching was unique. Once she taught a raga and asked me to practice it, and continue singing till she was ready.



Zia Shapiro

Zia, showing a sample ‘book’ says, “We have piles and piles of such ‘books’, in which Didi has written the songs for us, translated each word for us, and wrote the music, and the pronunciation of every single word for us in her own handwriting. She also gave us the history and context of each bhajan”.

I went on singing till my vocal chords gave up and I could not sing any longer. She quickly came out and rushed to the kitchen, made hot parathas with ghee, and gave them to me. I was pleasantly surprised to find my voice again. Srila further says that Didi did not like a song to be read from a text while singing. She insisted that the singer should know the song by heart. She used to say, “Music is sung from the heart and not read. How can you sing with bhava (feeling) if you do not know the meaning of the song and remember its wording?” Her American student, Joan, says that not just the placement in the body, which is so important, Didi would say, “I am waiting for you to sing from your psychic being, your psychic centre”. Another American student,

Karuna Didi, more than music

Not many people know that long ago Karuna Didi used to edit with Shri Dayanand Mishra, a Hindi children’s magazine, *Raja Bhaiya*, and wrote in it under the pen-name Anna Didi. In the Ashram she was associated with the editing of the magazine, *Sri Arvind Karmadhaaraa*, and also several books, specially *Arpan Gaan*. As in the case of music, as an editor also, she was a stickler for perfection. Although her forte was music, and she was adept at scholarly work, no work was too small or too low for her. She had washed utensils in the Ashram when she was younger, and even now, she sometimes served food. She repaired her torn clothes with patchwork herself



Joan Allekotte

till the end, and that too with perfection. Once she showed her patchwork to Premsheela, and asked her, “How many marks will you give me”. Premsheela told her, “Didi, 20 marks out of 10”.

Joan says, “Didi always brought in the spiritual dimension, the cultural dimension, a whole tapestry of stories, and built up the context. It took time for us, but Didi had so much faith in us”. Marsha says, “I am interested in philosophy, and was always asking Didi lots of questions. She opened up to me the world of Vedanta. That was a tremendous gift: it was really a life teacher”.

Karuna Didi, the person

A person cannot be a good teacher without being a good person. Her guru-bhai George Brookes summed her up as a person by saying that she was a combination of a wise elder and an innocent child. Another beautiful summary came from Pranjal, who said that the three streams of the yoga of the Gita: *karma, jnana and bhakti*, met in Karuna Didi. He also recollected that once an old building in the Ashram, to which she was very attached had to be demolished. When he went to talk to her about it fearing how she would react, and whether she would allow it, he was pleasantly surprised by her response. She said, “That is nothing. Delhi has been destroyed seven times, and rebuilt seven times. We do not have to be attached to material structures”. Although nearing 87, she was always ready for the Mother’s work. Laziness was something totally alien to her. In the December of 2016, there were exams going on in Matri Kala Mandir till the 24th, for which she had to work long hours, and it was assumed that she would be too tired to sing in the Sunday Satsang on 25 December. But lo and behold, she turned up, and sang. Sanghamitra Ghosh, the Principal of The Mother’s International School, remembers fondly that she would meet Karuna Didi in the corridor. What she got from Karuna Didi during these brief ‘chance’ meetings was an uplifting beaming smile, and a few words that would leave her with something deep to think about. Although she sang more in the Ashram than anywhere else, she was very happy to sing in a Dargah or a Gurudwara, which she did on several occasions. Joan recalls that the first time Didi sang in the Gurudwara was probably in California. When she was invited there, Didi got a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib, spread it on a table, and read it night after night to cull out the passages that she would sing. Such was her devotion that, Rangamma revealed, one night Guru Gobind Singh came to Didi in her dream and told her that she was the Gurus’ daughter.



Rangamma

Marsha Maslan

In short, she was a very compassionate person with a beautiful heart. Her love and compassion drew so many people to her. Marsha says, “Didi was like a magnet. When she stayed in my house, my house turned into a madhouse. So many people from all walks came, healers, artists, and what not, not just musicians. And Didi would receive all of them so affectionately”.

As is characteristic of deeply spiritual people, Karuna Didi had a very good sense of humour, and made others laugh at her expense. She went to the US once or twice a year, and stayed a couple of months there at a stretch. There she stayed in Joan Allekotte’s home. She often said she was like a shuttle cock. When Rangamma gives her a push, she lands in the US; when Joan gives her push, she lands in India. Once in the US, a security officer asked her whether she was carrying any liquid. She said, “No, I am completely dehydrated”. One who can crack a joke in that situation has to be a bundle of joy and fulfillment.

If Sri Aurobindo's tradition had the system of conferring sainthood, Karuna Didi would be an ideal candidate.

– Pranjali Jauhar

Leaving the body

About a week before she was to leave, she started withdrawing and started eating less. She responded to all persuasion and coercion to eat better with her characteristic humour. Finally she made a saintly exit from the body on 26 January 2017 to be in the Mother's lap. As Ms. Surendra Sharma said, when Karuna Didi would have met the Mother, the Mother must have said, "Excellent job done, my child". In the Ashram, Karuna Didi was synonymous with music: Karuna Didi was music, and music was Karuna Didi. She must be enjoying the hard-earned and richly deserved peace but we, in the Ashram, will always miss her.

This article is based on the tributes paid to Karuna Didi at the prayer meeting held in her memory on 7 February 2017 and on the interviews and write-ups provided by some of her disciples and admirers. Particularly acknowledged are the inputs from (in alphabetical order) George Brookes, Joan Allekotte, Marsha Maslan, Pranjali Jauhar, Premsheela, Rangamma, Sanghamitra Ghosh, Srila Basu, Surendra Sharma, Vijay Shankar Mishra, and Zia piro.

Rejection

SHISHU

*All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.*

SRI AUROBINDO ('Savitri' Book 3, Canto 2, SABCL Edition, p. 316)



Nice people who find it difficult to say 'no' to anybody end up being overburdened with work, so much work that it takes a heavy toll on their efficiency and well-being. Therefore they are often advised by their well-wishers to learn saying 'no'. Saying 'no' is equally important on the spiritual path, and is called rejection. We know that we should be saying 'no' to so many whims, desires and impulses, but still give in because of temptations and well-established habits. A few examples of what needs to be rejected are greed, anger and sex.

Inside-out or outside-in?

There are two approaches to getting rid of our undesirable elements. *One* is to acquire the knowledge and wisdom to see the harm they can do, and thereby gradually lose the attraction for them. If we are not attracted by the negativities, we will not indulge in them. Thus an inner change gets reflected in outer life. Or, put more simply, our thinking gets translated into what we do.

The *second* approach is to force ourselves to keep away from what is not good. The strong coercive will to keep away from what is inherently tempting may come from the authority of a scripture or a guru. By using such brute will-power, we hope that one day we will lose attraction for the evil. Thus our outer actions gradually start affecting how we think. But this division between the two approaches is somewhat artificial. If we wait for the inner change to do the whole job, the wait may be interminably long because some of the negativities are very deeply ingrained. Depending purely on the force of our will-power is even worse because it only sends the weaknesses into hiding, and they return with a vengeance at the least opportunity. Hence, both the approaches should go on simultaneously. Contact with the sources of right knowledge, right thinking, reflection, and use of will-power when the temptation actually presents itself should all be combined for the best results.

Why do the negativities exist?

Negativities exist because we are a curious mixture. We are animals, and yet we are unique among animals. Thus, the strong animal instincts related to food and sex persist in us, and yet we have the urge to go beyond feeding and breeding. Our goal is to transcend all limitations that obstruct our union with the Divine, but our tools are just the body and the mind, which are too blunt for the job. Therefore, we complete, at best, only a small part of the journey in one life. The result is that in every life we are born with baggage carried forward from the previous lives. In short, an average person carries so much of the evolutionary past as well as his individual past that negativities not only exist, they exert a strong gravitational pull in everyday life.

The route to rejection

The way to rejection is to simply reject. Going on asking precisely what to reject and exactly how to reject are excuses that merely postpone the issue, give us the false feeling of doing something, and try to hide unsuccessfully the lack of will power. If we are totally honest, we know what is to be rejected. Why we find it so difficult to actually do so is because while our divine essence, the psychic being or the soul, tells us to reject something, our feelings are unwilling, and the emotional part of the being exploits the intellect to invent reasons against the rejection. For example, if an official is offered a bribe, and his greed tempts him to accept it, he may argue, “I need the money”, “what I am paid is not enough”, “everybody is doing it these days”, “nobody will do this job for him without taking money – why not me”, “I will not get caught”, “it is only a small amount”, “for the one who is paying it, it is peanuts”, “if I do not become a part of the system, my colleagues will turn against me and try to lay a trap for me, and get me caught in spite of being honest, while they will escape in spite of being corrupt”, etc. etc. In the midst of all this noise, the clear but faint voice of the soul which says ‘no’ to greed gets drowned. In short, it is difficult to reject, even when we know that we should, because while one part of us wants to reject, another does not. Thus, it is the conflict within that makes rejection difficult. Therefore, rejection needs more than anything else, a strong will power. Will power can be strengthened, as the Mother has said, in the same way as muscles are strengthened – by repeated use. If we use the will power repeatedly, with each successive use, it gets a little stronger. But if it is only will power that is used, the weakness gets pushed into a corner, and can crop up again at an opportune moment. To prevent this, two types of mental work, both complementary, help. *One* is to realize the fragile, futile and flimsy nature of the pleasure we get from indulging in the weakness. *The other* is to taste the joy and peace that come from replacing the weakness with its opposite. Thus, greed should be replaced with contentment, hatred with love, anger with forgiveness. In short, active rejection using will power should be coupled with upgrading and internalizing knowledge and wisdom.

But the weaknesses can be so powerful that all this may also not be enough. Then we can always use the trump card of the spiritual path: approach the Divine, or the Guru, who is our bridge to the Divine. Any or all of our weaknesses may be offered to the Divine with the confession, “This weakness is too strong for me. Please help me. I offer the weakness to you to handle”. The Divine, in its Infinite Love and Compassion for us, makes it easy for us to reject the weakness. But God helps only those who help themselves. To earn God’s help, we have to put in our effort. Our effort consists of both outer and inner work: simply ‘saying no’ is the outer work, and the mental work is the inner work. Having done our best, we can offer the vice or weakness to God for further processing so that it will go out of our system completely. Getting it out of the system, so that we desire it no more, we think of it no more, is the self-mastery that rejection should eventually lead to.

Closing thoughts

Rejection is one of the three interrelated pillars of *sadhana* in integral yoga, the other two being aspiration and surrender. Unless the aspiration is intense and sincere, there can be no rejection and surrender. Rejection of what comes in way of realizing the aspiration is an inevitable necessity. Since personal effort is not enough for realizing the aspiration, surrender to the Divine is necessary to earn Divine Grace. The royal road to rejection also passes through Divine Grace, which is earned by offering our negativities to the Divine. Broadly speaking, we should reject everything that lowers consciousness. The perception of what lowers consciousness also keeps getting subtle as the individual progresses on the spiritual path. For example, being judgmental, or indulging in nostalgia, may lower the consciousness; and attachment to work, possessions and relationships may hinder further rise in consciousness. Therefore, these also need to be rejected. Hence rejection, like aspiration and surrender, remains a necessity on the spiritual path right up to the very end.

Also published as a blog on the Speaking Tree Website under the title ‘Saying No’ on 10 February 2017.
Link: <http://www.speakingtree.in/blog/saying-no-658717>

A reader, Shri Ashok Kumar Sethi, had requested for articles on Aspiration, Rejection and Surrender, the three pillars of sadhana in integral yoga. This article is second in the series. The article on Aspiration came in the January issue of ‘The Call Beyond’. Look out for the article on Surrender in the next issue.

hundred years ago

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

Silent is the Reign of Peace*

Thou hast made my heart and mind fall silent; but no voice has arisen from the depths of this silence. Peace alone has reigned, a sweet and beneficent guest.

THE MOTHER (In *Prayers and Meditations*, prayer dated 8 January, 1917)

*Title given by the editor

A Child's Trust in the Father's Omnipotence*



“May all who are unhappy become happy, may the wicked become good, may the sick become healthy!” Thus was formulated the aspiration within me concerning the manifestation of Thy divine Love through this instrument. It is like a request, a request a child makes to its father with the certitude that it will be granted. For the certitude was in me when I asked: it seemed to me so simple and easy; I felt so clearly in myself how it was possible. To grow from joy to joy, from beauty to beauty, is this not more natural and also more fruitful than always to suffer and toil in an ignorant struggle unwillingly undergone? If Thou allowest the heart to blossom freely at the touch of Thy divine Love, this transformation is easy and comes of itself.

Wilt Thou not grant this, O Lord, as a pledge of Thy mercy?

It is with the confidence of the child that my heart implores Thee this evening.

THE MOTHER (In *Prayers and Meditations*, prayer dated 14 January, 1917)

*Title given by the editor

The Synthesis of Yoga

THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS



To realise and unite oneself with the active Brahman is to exchange, perfectly or imperfectly according as the union is partial or complete, the individual for the cosmic consciousness. The ordinary existence of man is not only an individual but an egoistic consciousness. By detaching himself from all identification with mind, life and body, he can get back from his ego to the consciousness of the true individual, the Jivatman, who is the real possessor of mind, life and body. ...

We are not mind or life or body, but the informing and sustaining Soul, silent, peaceful, eternal, that possesses them; and this Soul we find everywhere sustaining and informing and possessing all lives and minds and bodies and cease to regard it as a separate and individual being in our own. In it all the moves and acts; within all this it is stable and immutable. Having this, we possess our eternal self-existence at rest in its eternal consciousness and bliss. ...

We realise the Divine, the eternal Self of all, first, as the source of all action and inaction, of all knowledge and ignorance, of all delight and suffering, of all good and evil, perfection and imperfection, of all force and form, of all the outgoing of the Nature from the eternal divine principle and of all the return of Nature towards the Divine....All force and idea and event and figure of things in the universe are only manifest degrees of this Self, values of the Divine and His eternal self-figuration. Thus viewing things and beings we may see them first as if they were parts and parcels of His divided being, but the realisation and the knowledge are not complete unless we go beyond this idea of quality and space and division and see the Infinite everywhere, the universe and each thing in the universe as in its existence and secret consciousness and power and delight in the invisible Divine in its entirety, however much the figure it makes to our minds may appear only as a partial manifestation. When we possess thus the Divine as the silent and surpassing Witness and the active Lord and all constituting Being without making any division between the aspects, we possess the whole cosmic Divine, embrace all the universal Self and Reality, are awake to the cosmic consciousness.

That into which we merge ourselves in the cosmic consciousness is Sachchidananda. Sachchidananda is the unity of the many-sidedness of manifested things, the eternal harmony of all their variations and oppositions, the infinite perfection which justifies their limitations and is the goal of their imperfections.

By entering into the cosmic consciousness we participate in that all-vision and see everything in the values of the Infinite and the One. ...Even our bodies are not really separate entities and therefore our very physical consciousness is capable of oneness with the physical consciousness of others and of the cosmos. The Yogin is able to feel his body one with all bodies, to be aware and even to participate in their affections; he can feel constantly the unity of all Matter and be aware of his physical being as only a movement in its movement. It is possible for him to unite himself in mind and heart with all existences, be aware of their desires, struggles, joys, sorrows, thoughts, impulses, in a sense as if they were his own, at least as occurring in his larger self hardly less intimately or quite as intimately as the movements of his own heart and mind. This too is a realisation of cosmic consciousness.

The link between the spiritual and the lower planes of the mental being is that which is called in the old Vedantic phraseology the *vijnana* and which we may term the Truth-plane or the ideal mind or supermind where the One and the Many meet and our being is freely open to the revealing light of the divine Truth and the inspiration of the divine Will and Knowledge. If we can break down the veil of the intellectual, emotional, sensational mind which our ordinary existence has built between us and the Divine, we can then take up through the Truth-mind all our mental, vital and physical experience and offer it up to the spiritual – this was the secret or mystic sense of the old Vedic “sacrifice” – to be converted into the terms of the infinite truth of Sachchidananda, and we can receive the powers and illuminations of the infinite Existence in forms of a divine knowledge, will and delight to be imposed on our mentality, vitality, physical existence till the lower is transformed into a perfect vessel of the higher. This was the double Vedic movement of the descent and the birth of the gods in the human creature and the ascent of the human powers that struggle towards the divine knowledge, power and delight and climb into the godheads, the result of which was the possession of the One, the infinite, the union with God, the Immortality. By possession of this ideal plane we break down entirely the opposition of the lower and the higher existence, the false gulf created by the Ignorance between the finite and the Infinite, God and Nature, The One and the Many, open the gates of the Divine, fulfil the individual in the complete harmony of the cosmic consciousness and realise in the cosmic being the epiphany of the transcendent Sachchidananda.

twenty five years ago

Sri K.D. Sethna: A Man With a Divine Touch

(An Interview by Sukhendu Roy)

Sri K.D. Sethna (1904 - 2011), popularly known as Amal Kiran, was one the foremost and very learned disciples of Sri Aurobindo. A poet, writer and cultural critic, he published more than 40 books.



The doorbell rings. I enter the premises. Sri K.D. Sethna sits alert in his *Mother India* editorial office... Since 1949 he has been editing *Mother India*... At the age of 86, Sethna, in spite of his physical constraints, continues unabated on his mission. He is in constant touch with his inner world. His inner being is at peace, always. ... I took an opportunity to talk to this man during my visit to Pondicherry. He was warm, affectionate and cordial. He spoke without reservation, with full confidence.

Q: Could you give an outline of your early life and how you happened to come to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry?

A: I was born in Bombay and educated at the Roman Catholic St. Xavier School & College. I passed my B.A. from Bombay University and started my study for M.A. In the course of these two years, I came in touch with somebody who had been acquainted with the Bengalee saint Pagal Harnath. After that I began to be interested in matters spiritual and looked out for all kinds of yogis passing through Bombay to show me some way to go beyond the mind and learn something of what they called the soul in me. I came across a Marathi yogi, and asked him what should I do. He told me, "Try to pull your whole self-awareness from the feet right up to your head and feel as if you were sitting on the top of your head; your consciousness should be there." Then he said, "When you feel you are there, you will see a ring of light. Try to jump into that ring and then you will be in Samadhi." So I tried to do this, day after day, night after night, but I never got to the top of my head! What happened one day as I was practicing this meditation was that I found myself out of my body and floating in the air above my body. It was very vivid. There was no question of dreaming. I would touch the wall on one side, go to the other side of the room and come back. Then I tried to analyse what was happening. But as soon as I did this I lost that state and I seemed to go back to my body with a rush. Then I could open my eyes but could not move any part of my body, which was for a short time as if paralysed. Thus I had an experience that had given me the conviction that I was not only my body and could live without it. When my materialistic friends argued with me, my experience which had been so vivid and concrete came to my rescue. This was the first abnormal or supernormal experience I had. Looking for some spiritual guidance I got one very unexpectedly. I went to a market in Bombay to buy a pair of shoes and bought my shoes. The man put them in a box, wrapped with a piece of old newspaper. I came home, opened the wrapping paper and my eyes fell on the sheet in front of me. There, in bold type, was the title of an article, "A visit to the Ashram of Aurobindo Ghosh." I read the whole article and said to myself, "This is the place for me!" That is how I came to Pondicherry and the shoes I had bought became the shoes of a pilgrim.

I touched Pondicherry on Dec 16, 1927. That was quite a long time ago. I am now 86 years old, and at that time was 23 years of age. I went to see the man who had been the intermediary between me and the Ashram: Ambalal Purani. From his room, through the north-side window, I saw the Mother walking on the roof-terrace of her house, drying her hair after a shampoo. It was a vision of beauty. It went straight to my heart.

Then after a time I had an interview with the Mother. In the interview I very dramatically told her, “I have seen the whole of life and now I only want God.” The Mother smiled a little and said, “What is your age?” I said “23”. “Oh at 23 you have seen the whole of life? Don’t be in a hurry, stay here and look around and then you can decide.” That was like cold water splashed on my enthusiasm. But **I realized that here was a Guru who was not greedy to have disciples.** Otherwise, generally Gurus say, “Of course, you can stay here.”

The first *Darshan* of Sri Aurobindo I had on Feb 21, 1928 – the Mother’s birthday. I made a few observations as to how he looked, what kind of beard he had, the shape of his nose, etc. I thought he was a nice *Guru* to accept. The next day I met the Mother and enquired of her whether Sri Aurobindo had said anything about me. She said, “Yes. He said that you have a good face.” I was examining Sri Aurobindo’s face and it turned out that he was doing the same for me – a sort of tit for tat! Then came a period of six months before the next *Darshan* on August 15, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday. In that period a great deal happened which was spiritually very decisive for me. I continued with my practice of meditation every day. In those days there used to be a pain in my chest as soon as I started to meditate. I reported the matter to the Mother and she told me not to worry about it – it would go away of its own. After a time that pain disappeared. I had a feeling that a wall had broken down in front of my chest: such a wonderful sense of opening, wideness, freedom, quietude and a great delight, almost an unbearable joy that seemed to be self-existent – not depending on any external circumstances. I was wondering how long it would last. Naturally, it could not remain all the time. It went away. But it left behind a permanent opening, and with such an opening a human being can have a natural devotion for the *Guru* and God. This opening is called the opening of the psychic being.

Excerpts from *The Call Beyond*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1992, p. 29
(To be continued)

kidspeak

Children generally know and understand much more than we think. Even in the realm of spirituality, they can show amazing insights because their psychic being is wide awake. This column will carry striking expressions suggesting remarkable spiritual development actually spoken by children. Readers are welcome to contribute to the column. Entries received may be edited and published at the editor’s discretion.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited The Mother’s International School recently, a child asked him, “When you were so far away from home, how did you make friends?”

His answer: “Initially I had no friends. Many people did not even like me. I just smiled at them, and gradually they became friends”.

humour

Once two Zen monks met on the road.

“Where are you brother?”, asked one.

“I’m in the place where nothing ever changes”, came the reply.

“But I thought everything was always changing”, said his friend.

“Yes, that never changes either”, came the clarification.

tip of the month

When a child is full of enthusiasm, never throw cold water on it, never tell him, “You know, life is not like that!” You should always encourage him, tell him, “Yes, at present things are not always like that, they seem ugly, but behind this there is a beauty that is trying to realize itself. This is what you should love and draw towards you, this is what you should make the object of your dreams, of your ambitions.”

THE MOTHER (*The Great Adventure*, p. 6)

appreciations

A Tribute to Karuna Didi

I met Karuna-didi in 1967 at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi when she was studying with Pandit Pran Nath. He took me along to visit her, and during that first meeting she told me that I was her “soul brother” from a past life. It was exhilarating to hear that!

Her devotional singing so impressed me that I invited her to America to teach for several weeks at my center in New Jersey. The public concerts I organized for her were always very well attended.

Over the years I have brought many groups of my students to India, and a highlight of these trips has been a private audience with Karuna-ji at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in New Delhi. We had intended to see her again at the end of this month. Her company will be sorely missed.

My only consolation is the happy vision of blissed-out gods in a higher loka gathering around her to listen to the celestial voice of our beloved Didi Karunamayee.

Sadly ,

Shyam Bhatnagar

(in an e-mail dated 6 February 2017)

Editor’s note: Prof. Shyam Bhatnagar was instrumental in persuading Karuna Didi to visit the US. His insistence led to Karuna Didi’s first visit to the US in 1987. That was the beginning of Didi’s annual visits to California to teach a group of Americans particularly interested in sufi music.

Two Men in a Train, and a boy just nine

SUTRADHAAR

*The year was 1939,
Two men in a train, and a boy just nine
Were travelling for Bharat Darshan with a stove,
Hunting the country for a treasure trove.*

*Their ticket said, 'Travel as you please',
To cook on the train they were pleased,
Not so pleased was the railway inspector called TT,
The last thing he expected was smoke billowing from an angeethee.*

*One of the men, called chacha-ji,
Told the TT, "look at our ticket, sir-ji,
'Travel as you please', says our ticket,
Cooking our food is what pleases our palate."*

*The travelers reached Madras (sorry, Chennai),
I am talking of 1939 when the city was called Madras, mere bhai,
They were told not far from here is Pondicherry,
Which has an Ashram for discovering the secrets of immortality.*

*The Masters there are Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,
Why don't you go there to get still wiser?
Now, Pondi was Bharat, and yet not Bharat,
The rulers there were French, not the British sahab.*

*Why not, said chacha-ji, always full of wit,
To invade French territory, we have all the grit,
The Ashram we will see, and blessings of the Masters we will get,
The title 'foreign returned' on top of that we will fetch.*

*So, in the year 1939,
Two men in a train, and the boy Anil then nine,
Reached Pondi, but where is the Ashram, they said,
Where are the bhajan-kirtan, shikshaa-deekshaa, or robes orange or red?*

*Wait for the Mother, they were told,
Wait they did like many others young and old,
As the Mother came down the staircase,
Were captured the two men in a daze.*

*She is a fairy, not a woman,
For our sake, She is in a form human,
She will be our Guru from now onward,
She will be our Guide for the journey heavenward.*

*Our chacha-ji, Surendra Nath: his motto was surrender not,
But surrendered he to the Mother without a thought,
“I lost my heart and won the soul”, said he,
Lived from then on, for the Mother’s work his friend and he.*

*Chacha-ji’s friend was Indra Sen, a professor at the University of Delhi,
Sri Aurobindo’s works answered his long-pending questions in psychology,
Chacha-ji asked the Mother on the other hand,
If he could have an Ashram in Delhi on his land.*

*Why not, said the Mother: Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch it will be,
My blessings for the Ashram in the capital city of Delhi,
Thus was born Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch in 1956,
When chacha-ji was just 53, not even 56.*

Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch was established on 12 February 1956. This poem is a summary of the events from the first visit of the founder of the Ashram to Pondicherry till the establishment of the Ashram.

notice board

Forthcoming events

Golden Jubilee of Matri Kala Mandir (23-27 February 2017)

Venue: Hall of Grace

DATE & TIME

EVENT

Thursday, 23 February 2017, 5 pm

Inauguration, Report of Activities
Hindustani Classical Vocal Music

Friday, 24 February 2017, 5 pm

Odissi and Bharatnatyam Dance Recitals
Carnatic Classical Vocal Music
Hawaiian Guitar and Flute

Saturday, 25 February 2017, 5 pm

Flute, Tabla and Spanish Guitar
Hindustani Classical Vocal Music
Kathak Dance Recital

Sunday, 26 February 2017, 5 pm

Kathak Dance Recital
Taekwondo

Monday, 27 February 2017, 5 pm

Violin, Keyboard and Sitar
Hindustani Classical Vocal Music
Sufi Darveshi Dance
Violin
Bharatnatyam Dance Recital

Saturday, 25 February 2017, 4 pm

Inauguration of the Art Exhibition
Venue: Art Room Foyer

The exhibition will remain open till 27 February 2017

Please note:

*The entry for all items is through SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM – DELHI BRANCH Gate no. 8
(opposite Sarvodaya Enclave)*

For enquiries & details, please call: 9555 80 7745

Contact us

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Please visit the website www.auromira.in

Feedback

Please send your feedback to
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