

The Call Beyond



Highlights

- The Law That Overrides Duties ... Page 21*
The Map Santiago Didn't Have ... Page 29
Choose Which Way the Story Goes ... Page 34



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Contents

Editorial

- *What the Earth Gives Back* 4

Article

- *What Grew While She Wasn't Looking* 8
- *What the Neighbours Learned Too Late* 15

Words of the Mother

- *You Need Not Appear Good* 20

Words of the Master

- *The Law That Overrides Duties* 21

Fifty years ago

- *My Grandfather's Coat* 22

Twenty-five years ago

- *Always Spiritualise.* 26

Book Review

- *The Map Santiago Didn't Have* 29

Kidspeak

- *Choose Which Way the Story Goes* 34

Appreciations

- *Feedback and Encouraging Words* 37

Notice Board

- *Contact us* 38

What the Earth Gives Back

All can be done if the God-touch is there.

— Sri Aurobindo (*Savitri*, CWSA Vol. 33, p. 3)

January began with a seed — the quiet recognition that *something waits in each of us*, patient and unhurried, carrying the blueprint of what we might become. February felt *the upward pull* — the flame of aspiration, steady and persistent, reaching not from ambition but from something that belongs to the flame's own nature. March asked us to find *the ground*: to discover, beneath the noise and urgency of the world, a peace deep enough to hold both the stillness and the work that follows from it.

Now April arrives, and with it, something the Indian earth has always known — that the year does not begin once. It begins many times.

In a single week this month, Punjab celebrates Baisakhi, Kerala observes Vishu, Tamil Nadu welcomes Puthandu, Bengal marks Pohela Boishakh, and Assam breaks into Rongali Bihu. Each festival has its own language, its own rituals, its own colour. But the underlying gesture is the same: the season has turned, and in some parts of the country the harvest is gathered, while in others a new cycle quietly begins.

What is remarkable about these celebrations is not their number but their quiet persistence. They do not wait for favourable conditions. They do not consult the headlines before deciding whether to proceed. The wheat ripens in Punjab even when the world is not at peace. The first fruits appear in a Kerala courtyard even when the news is grim. India's many new years are tied not to a calendar negotiated by empires but to the actual turning of the earth — and the earth, it seems, does not lose its nerve.

This quiet persistence is worth noticing, especially now.

Recent weeks have brought renewed instability in parts of West Asia, unsettling assumptions on which much of the world's economy quietly rested. Energy prices have been volatile; key shipping routes have faced disruption; and the effects have reached everyday life through rising costs and a growing sense of uncertainty. Closer to home, parts of the country head into election season, and the familiar energies of political contest add their own particular turbulence. The air is thick with argument, assertion, and the pressure to choose sides.

In such a climate, the act of beginning something new can feel almost foolish. Why plant when the storm has not passed? Why celebrate a new year when the old one has left so much unresolved?

And yet this is precisely what the earth does. It does not begin again because conditions are perfect. It begins again because beginning is its nature. The seed does not consult a risk assessment before it germinates. The mango tree does not wait for geopolitical clarity before it flowers. Something in the nature of things insists on renewal — *not as optimism, which depends on evidence, but as a deeper movement*, a fidelity to a process that is older than any crisis and will outlast it.

Sri Aurobindo saw in this not mere biological persistence but the signature of a spiritual truth. The evolutionary force that drives the earth forward does not proceed in a straight line. It moves through difficulty, through apparent setback, through long seasons of patience — and then, when the time is ready, it breaks through. Progress, in his vision, is *not the accumulation of external gains but the progressive self-revelation of a consciousness* that is always pressing toward a fuller expression. When conditions seem least favourable, the pressure is often greatest. The darkest hour is also the hour nearest to dawn — not because dawn is a reward for endurance, but because the turning is built into the movement itself.

The Mother spoke of this with characteristic directness. Progress, she insisted, is not something we achieve once and then preserve, like money in a vault. It is a living movement. It requires, at every stage, the willingness to begin again — not from scratch, but from a deeper place than before. The gratitude of January was real; the aspiration of February was real; the peace of March was real. None of it is lost. But neither is any of it a destination. Each becomes the soil for what follows.

And what follows, in April, is fruit.

Not fruit in the sense of a trophy — something to display and be admired for. But fruit in the way a tree understands it: the natural, unhurried result of roots that went deep, of a trunk that held steady through weather, of branches that reached without grasping. The Indian harvest festivals celebrate this kind of fruiting. The farmer does not take personal credit for the wheat. He worked, yes — he ploughed, he sowed, he watched, he waited. But he also knows that the essential work was not entirely his. Something in the seed, something in the soil, something in the patient turning of the seasons did what no effort of his could do alone.

There is a lesson here that an age which measures value largely through output finds difficult to hear. Not everything that matters can be forced. Not every important process can be accelerated. Sometimes the most real progress looks, from the outside, like waiting. And the moment of renewal, when it comes, arrives not because we summoned it but because we did not obstruct it.

Parts of the country go to the polls this month. New governments will be chosen. New promises will be made. That is renewal of one kind — necessary, often noisy, and always incomplete. But there is another kind of renewal happening simultaneously, quieter and far more enduring. In

homes across the country, a lamp will be lit at dawn for Vishu. A family will sit together for the Baisakhi meal. A child in Assam will put on new clothes for Bihu without understanding, or needing to understand, the theology of what she is enacting. These small acts carry forward a civilisation's faith in the process of life. They are not naïve. They are the earth remembering what it knows.

If the four months from January to April have traced a single arc in these pages, it is this: that the inner life — the life of gratitude, aspiration, peace, and now renewal — is not a retreat from the world but the ground on which any serious engagement with the world must stand. We do not renew ourselves in order to escape difficulty. We renew ourselves so that we can meet it with something more than anxiety, something more than reflex, something more than the restless need to react before we have understood.

The earth gives back what was planted in it. Not always in the form we expected. Not always on the schedule we preferred. But it gives back. That is its covenant, and it has never broken it.

In this month's Book Review, we take up Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* — a book that 150 million readers already know — and discover, through Sri Aurobindo's lens, that the treasure Santiago sought was buried not at the end of a journey but in the earth beneath his feet.

See also the related Book Review, 'The Map Santiago Didn't Have', page 29



What Grew While She Wasn't Looking

A story about the harvest that arrives without announcement

Ashish Bhateja

This story continues from “The Room Inside the Noise” (March 2026).

The heat arrived early this year.

Not the punishing heat of May — that was still weeks away — but the particular warmth of mid-April in Delhi, when the air begins to thicken and the afternoons stretch themselves out and the city collectively decides that morning is the only civilised time to do anything. The jacarandas along the main road had begun to flower, which meant that the pavement was covered in a thin carpet of purple that no one had asked for and everyone stepped over without noticing.

Yamini noticed. She was not sure when she had started noticing things like that. It was not the kind of thing she would have told anyone about.

She was walking home from the Saturday group — the donations group, the one she had been coming to for months now, because it was not about her. It had remained that. She was not in charge of anything. She had no title or role. She showed up, she sorted, she sometimes carried boxes, and she went home. Leela was there most weeks. They did not talk much. The silence between them had become its own kind of conversation — the kind that does not need to justify itself.

Today, though, Leela had said something.

They had been folding clothes — a fresh donation, mostly children's things — when Leela mentioned, without particular emphasis, that the picture books they had sorted a few weeks ago had gone to a reading corner at a municipal school in Sangam Vihar. Someone from the group had a connection there. The books had arrived on a Thursday. By Friday, the reading corner had a queue.

“A queue,” Leela said, as though this were an ordinary detail and not something that would stay with Yamini for the rest of the day.

Yamini had not known where the books went. She had not asked. She had sorted them on a Saturday morning while trying, and mostly failing, to sit with a piece of footage that had kept her up the night before. She remembered the morning clearly: the careful piles, Leela’s steady hands, the conversation about what it means to feel something without needing to account for it. She had gone home that day carrying something she could not name.

She had not, at any point, thought about where the books would end up.

And now they were in Sangam Vihar, and there was a queue, and a child she would never meet was reading a picture book about a tiger who could not find his stripes, and none of this had required her attention or her planning or even her awareness. It had simply happened — the way a seed put into the ground does what it does while the one who planted it is busy worrying about the weather.

She walked home through the market. The market was preparing for Baisakhi, which meant it was louder than usual and more colourful and everyone was in a slightly better mood without being able to say exactly why. A sweet shop had a new display — towers of gajak and rewri, arranged with the architectural seriousness that sweet shop owners bring to festival season. A fabric stall had put out rolls of yellow and orange, and a woman was holding one up to the light with the expression of someone making a decision far more consequential than fabric.

Yamini stopped at the vegetable stand. Her mother had asked for methi and fresh coriander. The vendor, an elderly man who had been selling vegetables at this spot for longer than Yamini had been alive, was wearing a new turban — saffron, neatly tied —

and conducting his weighing with a slight festive formality, as though the methi deserved more ceremony this week than last.

She thought about the queue in Sangam Vihar. She thought about the tiger who could not find his stripes. She thought about the fact that she had done nothing, really — nothing that she would have described as meaningful or purposeful or part of any plan. She had shown up on a Saturday and sorted some books and gone home and thought about other things entirely.

And yet something had happened. Not because she had made it happen. Because she had been in a room, and the books had been there, and Leela had been there, and someone else in the group had known someone at a school, and the school had a shelf, and the shelf had needed books, and the books had needed children, and the children had come.

It was not her achievement. That was the part that stayed with her. It was more like what happens in a field. You prepare the ground. You put the seed in. You water it when you can. And then something else does the rest — something you did not hire and cannot supervise and would not know how to instruct even if it took your calls.

At home, the festival had already begun its gentle invasion of the house.

Her mother was in the kitchen, which during Baisakhi week became a kind of command centre from which instructions were issued to the entire household with calm, unappealable authority. There was makki ki roti to be made, and sarson ka saag that had been simmering since morning, and a kheer that would appear later and about which no one had been consulted but everyone would eat. Her grandmother was supervising from the living room, offering commentary on the saag through the doorway with the quiet confidence of someone who had been making it for six decades and could detect an error in seasoning from twelve feet away.

Her father was, for once, not watching the news. He was on a ladder in the front room, fixing a string of lights that had worked perfectly last Diwali and had chosen this particular moment to develop an opinion about Baisakhi. He was muttering to himself in the way that men on ladders do — a running monologue addressed partly to the lights, partly to the universe, and not at all to anyone in the room.

“These bulbs,” he said, to no one, as Yamini set down the vegetables. “Made in China, sold with a guarantee, dead in six months. The guarantee is also made in China.”

Her brother appeared briefly, took a rewri from the box on the table, and disappeared again. He had the gift of presence that is really absence.

Yamini stood in the kitchen doorway and watched. Her mother kneading. Her grandmother correcting. Her father on the ladder. The saag on the stove. Outside, somewhere, a loudspeaker was testing itself — fragments of a bhangra track, then silence, then the same fragment again, louder.

It was, she thought, *the noisiest kind of peace*.

She thought about the months since the exam result. She had a habit of measuring — she did it without meaning to, the way some people bite their nails. Am I better? Have I grown? Is the thing I found still there, or have I lost it? The questions ran in the background like an application she could not close. Some days the answer felt like yes. Some days she was not sure. Some days the question itself felt like the problem — the insistence on checking, on verifying, on confirming that she had not imagined the whole thing.

What Leela had told her today offered a different kind of answer. Not the answer to am I making progress but to something she had not thought to ask: what has happened because I was there?

She had been so busy monitoring her own interior weather — am I peaceful, am I growing, am I doing this right — that she had not looked up to see what her presence, her plain, unspectacular showing-up, had actually done in the world. The work of the inner life and the work of the outer life are not two different things happening in two different rooms. They are the same roots feeding the same trunk.

She had thought she was just dealing with her own crisis. Sorting through her own cupboard, literally and otherwise. Sitting in her own silence. Learning her own lessons. And all of that was true. But while she was doing that, something else was moving — through hands and boxes and other people's connections, into a room she had never visited, for children she would never know.

Her grandmother called from the living room. "Yamini. Come taste the kheer."

The kheer was not ready. It would not be ready for another hour. This was her grandmother's way of beginning a conversation — to summon you for a purpose that was not the actual purpose. Yamini went.

Her grandmother was sitting with her tablet, which she used primarily for two things: devotional programmes and video calls with relatives in Lucknow. Today the tablet was dark. She was just sitting.

"You look different," her grandmother said.

Yamini sat down. "Different how?"

Her grandmother considered this. She was not a woman who answered questions quickly.

"Lighter," she said eventually. "Not happy-lighter. Just — lighter."

Yamini did not know what to say to this. She smiled.

“Your nani used to say,” her grandmother continued, in the way that grandmothers do when they are about to say something that has nothing and everything to do with what came before, “that the best things she ever did, she did not know she was doing at the time. She only found out later.” She paused. “Usually much later.”

Outside, the loudspeaker had found its full voice. The bhangra was now playing continuously, at a volume that suggested the operator believed music improved in direct proportion to decibels. Her father had come down from the ladder and was offering the loudspeaker his review from the window. Her mother was calling for someone to bring her the cumin. Her brother’s headphones were on. The saag was ready.

Yamini sat with her grandmother for a while. The house was loud and full and entirely itself.

She thought about the exam result, nearly a year ago now. How she had believed that her life depended on a particular outcome, and when the outcome refused to cooperate, she had been certain something essential had broken. She thought about the months that followed — the giving away, the satsang she had arrived at sideways, the noise she had learned to carry without drowning in it. She thought about what she had been looking for all this time: some sign that she was on the right path, some proof that the inner work was working, some evidence that she had not simply been sitting in rooms sorting things into piles for nothing.

The evidence had been in Sangam Vihar the whole time. She had just not known to look.

Today, Yamini is not sure what to call what has happened over these months. She does not think she has been transformed or awakened or any of the things that sound correct in books and false in life. She has a smaller word for it: planted.

Not by anyone. Not on purpose. But by the accumulation of small acts — the dresses she gave away, the mornings she showed up, the silences she sat inside, the noise she did not run from. None of it was building towards a result she could have predicted. But something took root, and something came up, and she was not watching when it happened.

The harvest festivals this month celebrate exactly this. Not the farmer's brilliance. Not the efficiency of his methods. But the astonishing, improbable, quietly miraculous fact that you can put something small into the earth and the earth will give it back to you larger, and more alive, and in a form you did not design.

Yamini does not know where this is going. She has given up needing to know. What she has instead is something simpler and, she suspects, more durable: the growing sense that she does not need to be doing something extraordinary to be part of what the books in Sangam Vihar became.

Her grandmother was right. She does feel lighter.

Not because the world has improved. The news is the same. The footage still comes in eleven-second increments. Her father still cycles between channels with the focus of a man who believes the truth is hiding somewhere between panels three and four. The exam has been retaken — the result is pending. The friendship has steadied itself, imperfectly, in the way that real friendships do. The future remains unscripted.

But somewhere in Sangam Vihar, a child she has never met is reading about a tiger who cannot find his stripes. And the tiger, she imagines, finds them in the end — where he already was.

The season has turned. Something has been harvested that she did not know she had planted.

That, for now, is enough.

What the Neighbours Learned Too Late

Ashish Bhateja

“Do not dream that when thou hast got rid of material poverty, men will even so be happy or satisfied or society freed from ills, troubles and problems. This is only the first and lowest necessity.”

— Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Aphorisms*

In Indian cities today, a ten-day silence retreat fills up months before it begins. The waiting lists are not short. The people on them are not monks or retirees. They are software engineers, marketing heads, young consultants, and increasingly, college students who already feel the need to recover from a life they have not yet entered. At the office, “I just got back from a retreat” has become as ordinary a sentence as “I just got back from Goa.” No one finds it strange.

The pattern is not difficult to trace. A professional works punishing hours for months, begins to fray, books a retreat, and returns feeling lighter. Within weeks, the old weight reassembles. The inbox has not changed. The targets have not softened. The comparison with peers has not paused. So the next retreat is booked — sooner this time, and perhaps somewhere more remote. What began as a holiday has become a programme. What began as rest now requires management.

This cycle invites a harder question than it usually receives. The retreats are not failing. They deliver exactly what they promise: temporary relief. The question is why the relief is always temporary — why it dissolves so completely upon return, as though the ten days of silence had been written on water.

The answer may not lie in the retreat at all. It may lie in what the retreat is being asked to compensate for.

South Korea's economic transformation between the 1960s and 1990s was among the most rapid in recorded history. A generation that had known hunger raised children who knew only plenty. By the early 2000s, the country had the highest suicide rate in the OECD, and its young people had coined a phrase for their condition: *Hell Joseon* — the feeling that the prosperity their parents had sacrificed everything for had become, for them, a kind of prison. Japan's arc was longer but arrived at the same destination. The word *karoshi* — death by overwork — entered the Japanese lexicon in the 1980s. A generation later, large numbers of young Japanese had withdrawn from social life entirely, a phenomenon the country named *hikikomori*. Neither nation lacked intelligence, resources, or cultural depth. What both lacked, by the time they noticed, was an inner framework strong enough to hold the weight of the outer achievement.

This was not an exception. It was a preview.

India is now deep inside the same transition, compressed, yet vast. In towns where the first branded supermarket arrived a decade ago, the first mental health helpline arrived last year. A twelve-year-old in Indore or Coimbatore may have access to private tuitions, a tablet, and a bedroom of her own — but not to a grandparent in the next room or an unhurried evening — nor to the particular kind of silence that once lived inside a joint family without anyone naming it. The family has not merely changed in structure. Something that it carried — an invisible architecture of rhythm, presence, and meaning — has thinned almost to the point of disappearance.

Adults, meanwhile, have learned a new vocabulary. They speak fluently of burnout, boundaries, self-care, and mental health days. These are not empty words; they name real suffering. But the vocabulary is borrowed, and it cannot cure what it names. The therapy session, the wellness app, the curated

morning routine — each addresses the immediate disturbance without asking what lies beneath it.

The disturbance runs deeper than work. It is a growing confusion between two versions of what a life is for. One version — older, inherited, never quite articulated — understood that the inner life is not a department of the outer life but its source. The other — newer, globalised, relentlessly persuasive — measures a life entirely by its visible outputs: income, status, consumption, achievement. Between these two, an entire generation is caught — not in poverty, but in a loss of orientation that no amount of prosperity can resolve.

This confusion is not new. It has been seen before, and named. Sri Aurobindo saw this with clarity. India, he wrote, “saw from the beginning — and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance, she never lost hold of the insight — that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities.” What is now being tested is whether that insight can survive the externality engine the modern world has built.

Why does the relief not last? Why does ten days of silence dissolve in ten days of noise? Sri Aurobindo’s diagnosis, offered over a century ago in *The Human Cycle*, was directed not at individuals but at the very structure of modern civilisation:

“It is found that civilisation has created many more problems than it can solve, has multiplied excessive needs and desires the satisfaction of which it has not sufficient vital force to sustain, has developed a jungle of claims and artificial instincts in the midst of which life loses its way and has no longer any sight of its aim.”

The retreat addresses the exhaustion. It does not address the jungle. The professional returns from silence into the same architecture of ceaseless stimulation, comparison, and desire —

and the architecture is stronger than those ten days of peace, because the architecture is built into the way life is organised.

Sri Aurobindo located the fault not in any particular system — economic, political, or social — but in a civilisational design flaw so fundamental that no surface remedy can touch it: “The radical defect of all our systems is their deficient development of just that which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man.”

The problem is not stress.

The problem is a life built without a centre.

What distinguishes India’s position in this global pattern is not that it is immune to the crisis — it clearly is not — but that it still possesses living resources that Japan and Korea had already thinned considerably by the time they recognised the need for them. India’s spiritual traditions are not museum pieces. They are not confined to temples, ashrams, or philosophy departments. They remain, however thinly in places, a part of the living fabric of ordinary life.

The Mother — who worked for over five decades to translate Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy into practical methods of education, health, and community — articulated a framework that speaks directly to the gap the modern world has produced. An education that addresses only the mind, she argued, will produce capable, anxious, inwardly homeless human beings. The wellness industry now exists, in part, to console them. What this points toward is an integral development — physical, vital, mental, and spiritual — in which the inner being is not an afterthought but the organising centre of the whole. It begins in small, practical recoveries: a school that makes room for silence alongside science, a family that protects one unhurried meal, a workplace that measures its people by more than their output.

This is not a prescription being imposed. It is a possibility being recalled.

The framework exists. The question is whether it will be taken seriously before the crisis deepens — or only afterwards, as it was in Seoul and Tokyo, when the statistics became unanswerable.

April, across India, is a month of harvests and beginnings. Baisakhi in Punjab, Vishu in Kerala, Puthandu in Tamil Nadu, Pohela Boishakh in Bengal, Bihu in Assam — each carries, beneath its regional colour, the same ancient question: what did the last season yield, and what will the next one grow?

A nation that has built, in a single generation, an extraordinary infrastructure of roads, metros, airports, and digital networks can take pride in what it has built in the outer life. Sri Aurobindo's vision, however, asks the harder question — not whether we are ascending, but in which direction:

"The ascent of man into heaven is not the key, but rather his ascent here into the spirit and the descent also of the spirit into his normal humanity and the transformation of this earthly nature."

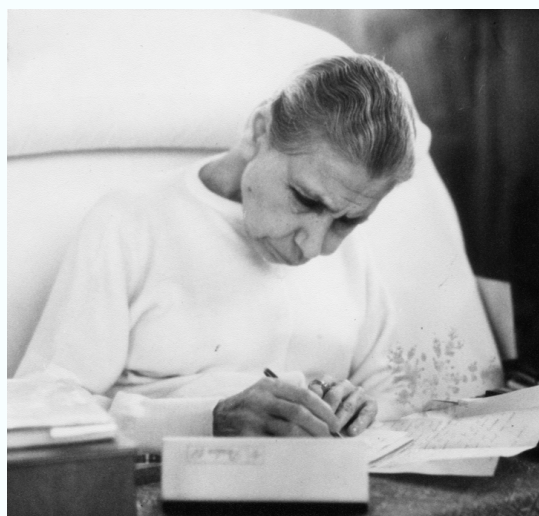
The relief will stop being temporary only when the inner life is no longer a retreat from the outer, but its living foundation. The harvest festivals will come again next April. What, between now and then, are we actually growing?



It is quite natural to want to meditate while reading Yogic literature—that is not the laziness. The laziness of the mind consists in not meditating when the consciousness wants to do so.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA Vol 29, Letters on Yoga - II, p 318)

You Need Not Appear Good



When you are absolutely sincere, you make a constant effort to live in harmony with the highest ideal of your being, the truth of your being. At every moment, in all that you think, all that you feel and all that you do, you try as perfectly as possible, as completely as possible, to put yourself in harmony with the highest ideal or, if you are conscious of it, with the truth of your being – then you have reached true sincerity. And if you like that, if truly you do not act from egoistic motives or for personal reasons, if you act guided by your inner truth, that is, if you are perfectly sincere, it is absolutely the same to you whether the whole world judges you in one way or another. In this state of perfect sincerity, you do not need to appear good or to be approved by others, for the first thing you experience when you are in harmony with your true consciousness is that you do not care what you look like.

The Mother ('The Great Adventure', p.101)

All the pages of The Mother's work, 'The Great Adventure', in Tara Didi's voice, have been uploaded on the YouTube channel of Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch. The link to the playlist is: The Mother's 'The Great Adventure' – Readings by Tara Didi

The Law That Overrides Duties



We must remember that duty is an idea which in practice rests upon social conceptions. We may extend the term beyond its proper connotation and talk of our duty to ourselves or we may, if we like, say in a transcendent sense that

it was Buddha's duty to abandon all, or even that it is the ascetic's duty to sit motionless in a cave! But this is obviously to play with words. **Duty is a relative term and depends upon our relation to others.** It is a father's duty, as a father, to nurture, and educate his children; a lawyer's to do his best for his client even if he knows him to be guilty and his defence to be a lie; a soldier's to fight and shoot to order even if he kills his own kin and countrymen; a judge's to send the guilty to prison and hang the murderer. And so long as these positions are accepted, the duty remains clear, a practical matter of course even when it is not a point of honour or affection, and overrides the absolute religious or moral law. But what if the inner view is changed, if the lawyer is awakened to the absolute sinfulness of falsehood, the judge becomes convinced that capital punishment is a crime against humanity, the man called upon to the battlefield feels, like the conscientious objector of today or as a Tolstoy would feel, that in no circumstances is it permissible to take human life any more than to eat human flesh? **It is obvious that here the moral law which is above all relative duties must prevail; and that law depends on no social relation or conception of duty but on the awakened inner perception of man, the moral being.**

Sri Aurobindo: "Essays on the Gita", CWSA Vol. 19, pp. 34-35

My Grandfather's Coat

Surendra Nath Jauhar

BUT the coat was not his own. It actually belonged to his elder brother. It was lent to my grandfather primarily for a family marriage. However, the coat was never returned. But my grandfather rarely used it. In fact, he was keen that when time came, it should be used by his sons.

After my grandfather died, many years later, my grandmother found the coat among the personal belongings of my grandfather. Then the time came when my grandmother was very happy to give the same to her son, who was elder to my father, and was in the service of the Kashmir State. It gave her immense delight and joy to see her son donning it because apart from the fact that it protected him against the severe cold of Kashmir, it had also become a sort of family symbol which she was passing on to the next generation.

In course of time, he passed the coat on to his younger brother, i.e. my father. My uncle had also used the coat with such care and thoughtfulness that when it was passed on to my father, it was still in very fine trim and form. This was also due to the fact that before giving it to my father, my uncle got the coat reversed inside out which gave the coat a new look.

The coat had something magical about it and when my father wore it, he used to feel so elated that he would acquire almost super-human powers. Thus, like the Puranic myths, the story started going around in our neighbourhood that this coat enabled my father to fly. The myth had its origin in the fact that my father used to trek to the school in a place known as Bhera, (now in Pakistan) which lay more than 15 miles away from our village, across the mighty river Jhelum. My father used to live in the school hostel and return to his village home every Saturday evening to collect the provisions for food etc. for the next week. He would

spend the weekend in the village and start again for Bhera on Sunday evening or some time at the dawn of Monday. It so happened that when he wore this coat, he would cover the long and difficult distance in a miraculously short time. The secret of his terrific speed, of course, lay in a subtle psychological factor which was that the 'shaan' (glory) of the coat inspired him so much that he walked at the speed of automobiles, because in those days hardly anyone kept or wore a woollen coat in our 'Ilqa' (neighbourhood), except of course the chieftains and princes.

My father was a very conscientious man, as were most of the men in those times, and he maintained this coat wonderfully well even though at times it was also used by his younger brother. Like his elder brother and father before, he was keen to see me wearing the same coat one day. However, since the coat had already become so many years old, its collars and sleeve cuffs had become worn out, and therefore father got the collars and cuffs covered with beautiful velvet, as a result of which, its form and glory were revived.

There were no fashions then and the size or fitting of the coats did not matter much in those days. People, being very utilitarian and thrifty, had simple ways of fitting the coat to different bodies. Thus, if the length of the coat and sleeves were found to be oddly big, they would fold the length and cuffs, according to requirements, and then stitch the folds. And in course of time, when the wearer grew in age and size, all that he had to do in order to make the same coat fit to the bigger body was to reduce or completely take out these stitches and unfold the folds below and at the cuffs. This way the garments were utilized to serve quite a few generations. Ultimately the day came when this family mantle was inherited by me. I was given the coat when I was studying at Lahore and it served me well in protecting me against the bitter cold of Lahore.

I had to give up my studies at the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School, Lahore, due to my participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhiji and was obliged to come out to Delhi. Amongst my most precious and dearest belongings that accompanied me to Delhi, was this coat. Here I wore it hardly for two or three years because later on there was no question of my putting it on due to my having taken to Khadi and all that goes with it. Hence it remained in my box for a long time.

That, however did not mark the end of the long life and career of the coat, although due to rapid and radical changes in the social and sartorial customs, which had set in since the thirties, there seemed to be hardly any possibility of its being used by our next generation – i.e., my son. Now a small family consisting of a widow and her two sons from our native village came to stay with us. They were in a very bad shape and deep straits and found shelter in our house. Of course, we supported the family and the widow used to assist in the household work. Her younger son was then about 10 or 11 years old. He had been put into school and later I got him admitted into college. But then he had no coat, and what to say of coat, they could not afford even ordinary clothing. The situation brought the family coat back to my memory and I gave it to the young boy.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the coat was indeed a blessed one and all those who had used it, had found prosperity, one way or the other. But to its last wearer the coat brought almost miraculous and instantaneous blessings. After graduating, the young boy got an appointment to give tuition of the daughter of a millionaire, a contemporary business-man. Within two years, the boy had not only been able to earn his living, but had also won a handsome bride – he married that very girl, the daughter of the millionaire businessman. She was the only daughter of her parents and this boy became the sole owner of the business and the property worth crores of rupees.

But the coat was essentially a relic of our family and it appears that no sooner it passed out of the family hands, than it “lost all interest in living any more” and passed into oblivion at the hands of the man who had acquired riches too soon and too easily to appreciate the value and significance of the coat. As I have said above, there was no longer any question of my passing it on to my son, but still my unfulfilled wish about this coat, which gave so much satisfaction and pleasure to so many of our generations, remains. I should have got back the coat so that I could keep it as a monument to those good old days when life had a different meaning and was guided by different values.

Reproduced from ‘The Call Beyond’, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1976, pp. 4-5



*Let us work as we pray.
for indeed work is the body's
best prayer to the Divine.*

A stylized handwritten signature, likely belonging to Sri Aurobindo, written in black ink.

Always Spiritualise

Dr. Makarand Paranjape

If I were asked to coin a slogan for the brave new millennium into which we are entering, I would say: “Always spiritualise.” But what does this really mean? Sceptics will immediately be reminded of a neo-Marxist formula which went as follows: “Always historicise.” Applied especially to the interpretation of texts and events, the formula made us conscious of the fact that every event, every text, had its own particular time and place in the history of material reality. In other words, it was part of a certain historical process. Locating it in this larger story or narrative would be to unlock the key to its true meaning and significance.

By the same token, “always spiritualise” would mean to see the spiritual meaning and significance of things. This is akin to Sri Aurobindo’s famous utterance: “All life is Yoga.” What Sri Aurobindo’s statement suggests is a different approach to life. Similarly, “always spiritualise” really implies a shift in attitudes or, to be more precise, a shift in consciousness.

Let me illustrate. Suppose you’re a businessman, dealing with many customers. It is natural that most of these interactions would be restricted to business matters, that is, most of your relationships would be merely business relationships. But if you were to begin to spiritualise some of these contacts, you’ll observe that they will transform the very manner in which you do business. You’ll realise that your business does not merely satisfy some physical or economic need of your customers, but also has the capacity to touch them deeply, even affect them spiritually. Indeed, even the money you make will begin to resemble a spiritual force, which you can put to either good or bad use.

To spiritualise also means to be sensitive to the spirit behind actions, not just to their outward appearance. A busy husband returns home late in the evening from a business trip. He has missed his lunch. On reaching home, he finds his wife, herself a working woman, preoccupied with some pending household chores. He tries to busy himself with some of his own work, only to find that dinner is served later than usual. He feels like screaming at his wife. Instead, he praises his wife's cooking and says, almost casually, that he is especially hungry because he's missed lunch. His wife's face falls: "I thought you were busy working and that's why I was late in serving dinner." The husband wants to discover the spirit behind his wife's action of delaying the dinner and not react merely to her actions. This saves the couple needless unpleasantness and misunderstanding.

Always to spiritualise also means to bring to ordinary actions an extraordinary awareness or insight. While reading J. Krishnamurti, I am always struck by how unusual his walks were, which he took almost religiously each day. For Krishnamurti, walking was not merely an exercise or a daily chore, but an act of meditation. How aware he was when he walked. All his writings bear testimony to this extraordinary capacity for observation of the life around him, especially during his walks. The Mother transformed an ordinary game of tennis into a very special spiritual lesson for those who had the good fortune of being her partners or opponents.

Always spiritualise means not to lose our faith in the universe, not to yield to gloom and depression, not to lose hope in the goodness of people—above all, to be open to life and its positive, healing energies.

Courtesy : Life Positive/April 2000

Reproduced from 'The Call Beyond', Vol. 26, No. 1, 2001, p. 26

[Editor's Note: Those interested in learning more about bringing spirituality into everyday activities, such as 'Driving', 'Politics', 'War' or 'Gossip' may read 'What is Spiritual About Being Punctual' by Ramesh Bijlani (Published by Rupa Publications in 2022), which has 36 short essays on such topics. The book is available on amazon.in as well as in the bookshop in Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch]



The complete immunity from all illness for which our Yoga tries can only come by a total and permanent enlightenment of the below from above resulting in the removal of the psychological roots of ill health—it cannot be done otherwise.

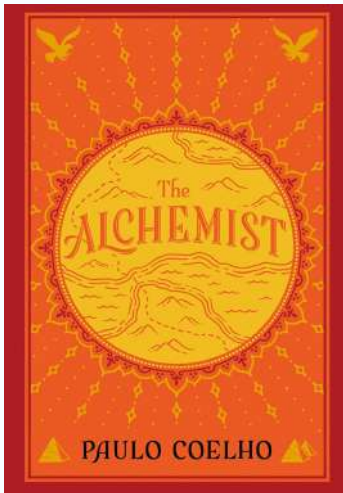
Sri Aurobindo (CWSA Vol 31, Letters on Yoga - IV, p 559)

1966
Cling to Truth

The Map Santiago Didn't Have

Ashish Bhateja

The Alchemist. By Paulo Coelho. HarperCollins, London, 1993. 163 pages



Few books have been pressed into as many hands, by as many different kinds of people, as Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. Since it first appeared in Portuguese in 1988, it has sold over 150 million copies, been translated into eighty languages, and earned a Guinness World Record as the most translated book by a living author. It is read by teenagers discovering ambition and by middle-aged professionals rediscovering purpose. It is

quoted at graduation ceremonies and on Instagram. It is, in short, one of those rare books that seems to belong to everyone.

The story is easily told. A young Andalusian shepherd named Santiago has a recurring dream about treasure buried near the Egyptian pyramids. He sells his flock and sets out to find it. What he finds instead is the subject of the book.

And yet, for all its familiarity, *The Alchemist* has not been widely read through the one lens that would reveal its deepest structure. That lens belongs to Sri Aurobindo.

This review is an experiment. It does not seek to correct Coelho or find fault with his fable. It asks a question: what happens to the concepts we know so well from *The Alchemist* — the Personal Legend, the Soul of the World, the Language of the World — when we hold them against the map of consciousness that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given us? The answer, it turns out, is not that Coelho was wrong. It is that the road goes further than he drew it.

Consider the book's most famous idea: the Personal Legend. "When you want something," the mysterious old king

Melchizedek tells Santiago early in the journey, “all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” This is the line people remember, the one that has launched a thousand motivational posters. But what exactly is this “something”? Coelho calls it a personal destiny, a dream planted in the soul. Sri Aurobindo called it something both more precise and more radical. “Everyone has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse.” The difference is not trivial. Coelho’s *Personal Legend* is discovered through signs and omens. Sri Aurobindo’s psychic being — the evolving soul that sits behind the heart, carrying the truth of one’s purpose across lifetimes — does not merely signal. It insists. It presses upon the surface personality with a quiet, sometimes inconvenient persistence. One either yields to it, or spends a lifetime in the dull ache of refusal. The crystal merchant of Tangier, with whom Santiago works after losing all his money on his first day in Africa, knows his own dream but will never act on it. He is Coelho’s portrait of that refusal. Anyone who has met the psychic being’s pressure and looked the other way will recognise him instantly.

Then there is the journey itself. Santiago crosses a desert, loses everything, works in a crystal shop, falls in love, learns to listen to the wind. What is happening here, in Integral Yoga’s terms? Santiago is moving through the planes of consciousness — not as a yogi in meditation, but as a man in life. The contentment of his shepherd days can be seen as the satisfaction of the vital being; the awakening of purpose through Melchizedek is the mind becoming aware of something larger than itself; the discipline of the crystal shop is the slow forging of an instrument fit for the work ahead. These are not imposed categories. Coelho describes the stages faithfully, even if he does not name them. Sri Aurobindo provides the nomenclature; the experience is the same.

It is in the desert that *The Alchemist* enters its most interesting territory. Crossing the Sahara with a caravan, Santiago meets an Englishman searching for an alchemist — and eventually meets the alchemist himself, who teaches him not formulae but a way of listening. Coelho calls this the “Language of the World” — a mode of knowing in which the observer and the observed cease to be separate. The boy listens to the desert, converses with the wind, reaches through to the “Soul of the World.” In Sri Aurobindo’s cartography, this corresponds to an opening toward the cosmic consciousness: the direct perception that a single spirit moves through all forms. It is a genuine spiritual experience, and Coelho renders it honestly.

But here the fable reaches its edge. **Coelho’s Soul of the World is a real experience — but in Sri Aurobindo’s map, it is not the summit; it is where the ascent begins.** Above the cosmic consciousness, Sri Aurobindo describes planes of increasing luminosity — from the Higher Mind through Illumined Mind and Intuition to the Overmind — each a more direct mode of knowing than the last. And beyond all of these lies the Supermind, the Truth-Consciousness that does not merely unify all things but holds the original creative intention behind each thing. The Mother described it simply: “The soul is the Divine made individual without ceasing to be divine.” Coelho takes his reader to a magnificent vista. Sri Aurobindo says: the mountain continues.

And yet the book’s ending may be its most Aurobindonian moment. Santiago returns to the very spot where his journey began — the ruined church in Andalusia — and discovers the treasure buried beneath the sycamore tree where he first dreamt. The treasure he crossed a continent to find had been lying beneath the tree where he slept with his sheep. This is, quite precisely, the logic of Integral Yoga. **The Divine does not wait at the end of an escape from matter; it is hidden in**

matter itself, and the journey of consciousness is the means by which we learn to recognise what we have been standing on all along. Sri Aurobindo's entire philosophy rests on this conviction: not a flight from the world, but a transformation of it. Santiago's return is a parable of that transformation, even if Coelho does not press it to its full conclusion.

What, then, does Sri Aurobindo add? Not a contradiction but a deepening. Where Coelho offers a fable, Sri Aurobindo offers a framework. Where Coelho shows that the universe responds to a sincere aspiration, Sri Aurobindo explains *why* — because the universe is itself evolving, and the individual who follows the psychic being's call is participating in the evolution of consciousness. Where Coelho's alchemy turns lead into gold, Sri Aurobindo's — the final alchemy — turns matter into a vessel for the spirit.

The Alchemist draws on Sufi mysticism, Christian alchemy, and the storytelling traditions of the Middle East. It does not reference Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. But the fact that its central insights — the soul's unique mission, the oneness of all things, the transformation that follows surrender — resonate so naturally with Integral Yoga is itself a quiet confirmation of what Sri Aurobindo taught: that truth, wherever it appears, is one. Coelho's little fable is one path up the mountain. Sri Aurobindo's teaching is the map that shows where all the paths are heading — and that the mountain, far from ending at the peak, opens into a sky we have barely begun to imagine.

There may be a wider invitation here — for readers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and for anyone drawn to their teaching. We sometimes read the world's popular spiritual literature defensively. We measure it against what we already know and note where it falls short. But that is not how the Mother herself read. She found truth in the Koran, in the Dhammapada, in the meditations of Marcus Aurelius. Sri Aurobindo wrote that the Sanatana Dharma “rejects nothing

but insists on testing and experiencing everything.” The deeper practice, then, may be to read these widely loved books — Coelho, Gibran, Tolle, Frankl — not as competitors to Integral Yoga but as fellow travellers whose insights become fuller, richer, and more luminous when placed within the framework that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have provided. The teaching is not a fortress. It is a light, and it works best when you turn it outward.

[Editor’s note: Paulo Coelho (b. 1947, Rio de Janeiro) is a Brazilian novelist whose works are estimated to have sold over 350 million copies worldwide. The Alchemist, originally written in Portuguese in 1988, holds the Guinness World Record for the most translated book by a living author, having been published in over eighty languages. The book’s concept was inspired by a 1935 short story by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Tale of Two Dreamers’. Coelho, who wrote the novel in just two weeks, has said the story was “already written in his soul” — a phrase that, for readers of Sri Aurobindo, carries its own quiet resonance. This review inaugurates an occasional series in The Call Beyond in which we re-read widely loved books through the lens of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s teaching — not to judge them, but to show how Integral Yoga illuminates and extends insights seekers across traditions have arrived at.]



It is not Yoga to give free play to the natural instincts and desires. Yoga demands mastery over the nature, not subjection to the nature.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA Vol 31, Letters on Yoga - IV, p 260)

This column carries children's utterances that reflect their innate spiritual wisdom. Readers are encouraged to contribute to this column.

Choose Which Way the Story Goes

The context of the content of this episode of 'Kidspeak' is a recently published children's story, 'The Unwanted Coin', by Ramesh Bijlani, published by the Motilal Banarsidass Publishing House.



The story goes like this. An American tourist loses an American coin in his hotel in India. When anybody tries to use the coin in India, most people reject it as 'fake' till someone accepts it absent-mindedly. Finally, the coin reaches a kind old lady, who makes a hole in the coin and passes a thread through the hole to make a necklace. She 'charges' the necklace with her prayers and gives it to a boy in her neighbourhood. She

tells the boy that the necklace would bring him good luck. The author interrupts the story here, and encourages the reader to continue the story further.



The story was narrated to the students of Class III of The Mother's International School by their headmistress, Ms. Neethu Somarajan, and the children were encouraged to 'complete' the story as they liked. Following are some of the responses made by the children.

The Coin That Found Its Way Back

The coin was very special to the boy but his mom would not let him keep it. She said “Give it back to the person you got it from.”

So, he gave it back to the lady. The boy asked the lady to give it back to the person she got it from, and she did. Then, each shopkeeper gave it back to the person they got it from.

It finally reached the housekeeping person in this way, who thought the tourist kept it under the tablecloth to keep the coin safe.

The coin then jumped back into the purse having had a true adventure.

Mahit Shah 3A

The Talking Coin

The boy wore the necklace every day. One morning the coin spoke. It said, “Good morning!” The boy looked down. He rubbed his eyes. He said, “Coins cannot talk!” The coin said, “Yes, I can.” The boy laughed loudly. The coin told silly jokes. The boy laughed more. A friend asked why he was laughing. The boy showed the necklace. Everyone laughed at the jokes, and even more to see a coin speaking. The coin felt loved and proud.

Vedika Prasad Chaphekar 3B

The Coin That Was Never Unwanted

The boy wore the necklace every day. The coin made a soft sound when he walked. His friends noticed it and smiled. The boy told them the story of the coin. They listened with interest. One day, the boy saw a younger child crying. He remembered the kind lady. He shared his lunch and comforted the child. The child smiled again. The boy felt happy inside. The coin shined in the sunlight. It felt proud to be part of a kind act. The boy learned that even small things can bring big happiness.

Amaira Chaturvedi 3C

The Secret of the Pendant

After the old woman gave the boy the coin pendant, he never took it off. He topped his exams. Everyone wondered how he always topped. A new girl called Sara joined the school. She became the class topper among the girls. The boy wondered how it happened. He understood that the girl had some good luck charm.

One day, during recess, Sara showed the boy a pendant. He asked, "Who gave you this?" "An old woman." replied Sara with a smile. She opened her pendant and showed the boy a message hidden inside it

"Luck belongs to those who put effort into whatever they do."

The boy then opened his pendant and found the same message written inside his pendant as well. Then they remained best friends forever.

Shreya Mitra 3D

The Laughing Coin

The boy wore the necklace all the time. He wore it also to the school. The coin liked jokes and funny faces. It started laughing softly, hee-hee. The boy felt a little shake on his neck. He smiled for no reason. His friends looked at him and laughed too. The coin laughed louder, ha-ha. The boy tried to stop smiling. He covered his mouth. The teacher saw him and raised her eyebrows. The boy stood straight and stayed quiet. The coin also became quiet. At lunch time, the boy shared his food with a friend. The friend laughed happily. The coin laughed again, softly and happily. It liked kindness more than jokes. The boy learned that spreading laughter and kindness makes everyone smile.

Isha Chaudhary 3E

Editor's Note: The book, 'The Unwanted Coin' is available at the bookshop in Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Delhi Branch), and also on amazon.in, amazon.uk and amazon.usa

Feedback and Encouraging Words

Feedback on 'The Call Beyond'

Thanks for sending 'The Call Beyond' monthly deliberations. I enjoy reading 'The Call Beyond' whenever and whatever I can grasp from it.

Abhishek Tripathi
(in an email dated 7 April 2026)



To bring into activity the principle of oneness on the material plane or to work for humanity is a mental mistranslation of the Truth—these things cannot be the first or true object of spiritual seeking. We must find the Self, the Divine, then only can we know what is the work the Self or the Divine demands from us.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA Vol 29, Letters on Yoga - II, p 6)

Strength, if it is spiritual, is a power for spiritual realisation; a greater power is sincerity; the greatest power of all is Grace.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA Vol 29, Letters on Yoga - II, p 172)

Surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the Divine, to offer all one is and has, not to insist on one's ideas, desires, habits etc., but to allow the divine Truth to replace them by its knowledge, will and action everywhere.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA Vol 29, Letters on Yoga - II, p 67)

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

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Note

In our efforts to reach larger numbers, the Ashram is expanding its Mailing List to reach out to more and more who may benefit from the teachings of the Master and the Mother.

To get included in the Mailing List, please go to <http://erp.saaonline.net.in/addcontacts.cfm> to fill in a form, which will take you only a few minutes.



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