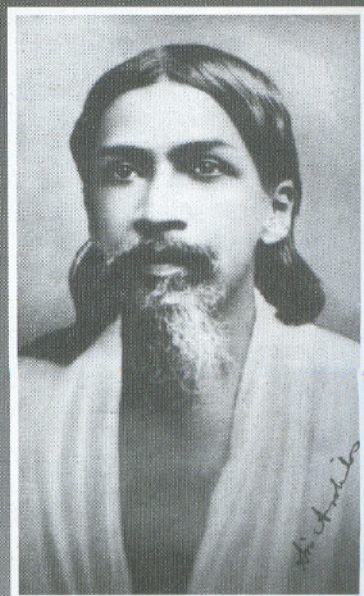


beyond traditional yoga

The Adventure of Evolution



Sri Aurobindo



From fear to bliss in my body cells

If mankind could but see, though in a glimpse of fleeting experience, what infinite enjoyments, what perfect forces, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not yet conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures. But the way is narrow, the doors are hard to force, and fear, distrust and skepticism are there, sentinels of Nature, to forbid the turning away of our feet from her ordinary pastures.

Sri Aurobindo, 1913

These powerful lines were written by one of the greatest of 20th century Indian masters and visionaries. In this awesome description of how human consciousness is capable of being transformed, Sri Aurobindo gives a 'glimpse' of humanity's future evolutionary unfolding, in the perspective of its cosmic beauty and spiritual plenitude. Sri Aurobindo's own life's work, together with his spiritual collaborator, a French woman known as The Mother, was to help set this transformation into motion.

The passage quoted above is also a fantastic promise for any individual willing to partake consciously in this vast adventure of evolution. When she read these lines, in 1973, Bhaga was transfixed with awe, and something deep in her said, 'This is what I want to live!'. She later wrote, 'In such moments a destiny is sealed'.

She had already moved from France to Auroville, an international township founded in 1968, with the blessing of UNESCO, near Madras in South India by The Mother. Auroville means 'The City of Dawn', and its purpose is to be the first collaborative attempt at exploration and expression, by anyone interested, of that new consciousness awaiting us all.

She was practising Integral yoga, the new, all-encompassing method of yoga (inner development), which Sri Aurobindo and The Mother had found through their own experience for that new, evolutionary purpose. But she had no idea that she would one day find herself, as they had, exploring the secret consciousness of her body-cells.

At first the results of her spiritual efforts were, as normal in this new yoga, those which are also obtained through the more traditional ways of yoga: in November 1973, a breakthrough into the cosmic divine Reality 'behind', which supports this external reality. Her sudden perception of that lasted only a few moments, but left some more permanent results in her consciousness. And then, in May 1975, another breakthrough, in her words, 'This time into the secret space deep within where the soul in us eternally meets her Beloved: The Divine. The well known result of such an opening of the heart chakra is what in India they call *bhakti* - in the West, they say 'devotion', but what a poor word! It is in fact love, irresistible love for the Divine; it is utter tenderness and sweet intimacy too, in the divine Presence and Embrace.'

Then her 'adventure' took her beyond the traditional paths of yoga. She continues:

These were the poor cells in my ankle, experiencing still all the fear which I had conquered in myself

I was in for a big surprise. The first time I became aware of the consciousness of the cells somewhere in my body, it was in a quite unexpected and rather amusing manner. It was around 1976. At that time I used to cycle every Sunday to another Auroville settlement, far from the one I lived in. On my way, I had to cross a local village where the dogs had the bad habit of running and barking after you in the most menacing manner. Every time, I was dying with fear.

...Until the day when I angrily told myself, 'Come on now, you're doing a yoga of Transformation, you're quite often immersed in states of consciousness most people never experience in a lifetime, and here you are, dying with fear because of these dogs! It has to change!'

During the week I trained myself non-stop to remain absolutely calm: breathing deeply, remaining centred within... Sunday finally came again. I passed again in front of the dogs. In complete peace. They started to bark and came running after me, all teeth out. I ignored them, my concentration riveted to the words I kept repeating to myself inwardly: 'Peace... Peace...' It was working! I felt no fear! I was almost past the village, and I was about to rejoice wildly about that victory, when suddenly, in the almost total silence and 'peace...' of my being, I 'heard' some tiny angry voices, coming from... my right ankle! Yes, from the spot under direct threat from the last dog still running after me. These tiny voices were saying: 'To hell with her peace! Of course, it's easy to remain calm when it's not she who is going to be bitten, but us!'

At the same time, I became aware that down there, in that ankle, it felt as if a whole crowd of microscopic people were trying to get away from the spot, in a panic. I realized at once that these were my cells, the poor cells in my ankle, experiencing still all the fear which I had conquered in myself. I was stunned. I could feel that I was for them a tyrant, not having ever a thought for them, or a movement of tenderness or gratitude towards them, who were actually doing all the work in my life. I never in fact had acknowledged them as alive and conscious in their own way. I was ashamed.

I apologized inwardly. From that day on, I did try my best to remember their existence, at least from time to time. But the experience didn't repeat itself, until three years later something else happened.

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Bhakti in the cells

In the incident narrated above, my cells' consciousness wasn't in the least 'spiritual'. Three years later, it was quite different. I started noticing at some point that the same inner movements of my central consciousness which I had grown accustomed to feel in the region of my heart chakra, as expressions of the intense *bhakti* there, were now to be felt also, on a microscopic scale somehow, in the mass of innumerable tiny specks of consciousness in my legs and arms. The same spontaneous movement upward of aspiration for the Divine, the movement forward of self-giving, the movement inward of concentration, the melting sensation of love and gratitude for the Divine: I could recognize all those well known expressions of *bhakti* right there in my limbs, multiplied by the thousands of cells. I perceived the way they felt. It translated itself each time as a kind of specific vibration, different according to the feeling they were experiencing: *bhakti* in its different forms; but also, very often still, fear.

For most of us human beings, at least in the Western world, life has become something one feels tense about more or less permanently. Stress, hurry, worry, anger, frustration, disappoint-

ment, resentment bring right into the cells of our body the same basic 'No' attitude of perpetual psychological tension, which shows also on a larger scale through our whole body's attitudes. Our cells have normally no way to counteract or avoid this negative influence on the part of the individual they constitute the body of. If we ourselves, because of a fear-inducing education, or because of actual bad experiences in our life, instill all this negativity, even without knowing it, into our cells' consciousness, after a while it erodes their natural, built-in confidence in their own self-repair and healing capacity; their general attitude towards life then becomes Fear - which, in terms of physiological results in our body, is disastrous.

In the last decades there has been an increasing flow of books bringing our attention to the influence our mind and our emotions have on our body. What is not yet known, though, which Sri Aurobindo and The Mother spoke about and which I will now illustrate by my own example, is that our cells' consciousness not only can and does respond passively to our central consciousness and is influenced by it, but now, thanks to the on-going march of evolution, our cells are able to make their own choices for their own life, independently from 'us'.

Prey to fear

As can be seen in the instance of 'yoga on the roads' that I have described, my body used to be, and still is to a certain extent, a helpless prey to numberless fears. It happens to be very acutely aware of, on the one hand, its own extreme sensitivity and vulnerability, and on the other hand, of the infinite range of possibilities of getting hurt, which it is constantly and inevitably exposed to, even at night when asleep. It even has some haunting fears which nothing in this life explains, and which evoke some vague, but terrifying memories of previous lives which I have never ventured to dig up. Anyway the result was that most of the time my poor body was a living knot of fear, and that my life was becoming, even at home, a constant nightmare of apprehensions and forebodings. As I knew very well that fear 'magically' tends to help the very thing or event you fear to actually happen, I was doing my best to reassure and calm down my body, as one does a fearful child. But my body's attitudes, the constant frown on my tense face, started reflecting the plight of my cells, and I really didn't know what to do about it. Why did life have to be so dangerous?

Then one day, they (my cells) discovered something truly interesting: when they were in a state of total self-abandon to the Divine, not only did an indescribable sense of relief and well-being come into them, but often it deepened into pure and tranquil bliss... and what was more,

that way of being seemed to actually ward off, automatically as it were, any unpleasant physical event that might have threatened to befall them at the time. Gradually my cells realized that to keep themselves as permanently as possible 'in the Divine' was the only way they could be really secure. It was as if, beyond the normal, physical law of the accident and the hurt, there was a higher and more powerful Law one could trust and seek refuge under, or rather, into, for it felt almost like a different space within the normal space: a 'magic' space!.. Something like a world where all goes well, right within this disharmonious and dangerous world.

So, little by little, my cells learnt to relax and rejoice. In fact, they were discovering a different way of living, which was so utterly wonderful that they could hardly believe it was really true, truly real. It was as if the subconscious dire mem-

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ory of so many lives and aeons of hardship and misery was slowly being erased and replaced by a stronger and stronger certitude that, this time, things were really changing, life was really becoming something worth living, where they, the cells, could make their own choices for their own happiness. Only, the new way of living had to be learnt; it was not yet spontaneous, and, as we all know if we have tried to change, the old habits die hard, and the old reactions keep springing out of their Pandora's Box in a seemingly endless repetition. In the case of my cells, the old reaction was fear, first; and also, lurking in the background, a stark and mute sub-conscious despair. Two or three times, still half-awake in the morning or after a nap, the very first, fugitive thought I had caught, being expressed by a tired and poignantly sad voice from some unknown abyss in my being, was: 'What is the use of waking up?..'

So it is not all yet healed; far from it. One has to be really and unflinchingly patient. But at least, in spite of the drawbacks and fluctuations which cells experience in their state of consciousness just as we do, a slow reversal of all that sadness and fear was undeniably taking place now, because my cells were in love with the Divine, just as I was, and even more eager than me, it seemed, to keep a permanent contact with It!

Love song

For I could feel their *bhakti* at times when I myself was in a quite ordinary state of consciousness, with my own *bhakti* rather asleep, or entirely forgotten: my

body-cells were now having their own spiritual life, independent of my own! It even happened twice that I woke up at night because of the intensity of their *bhakti*, which was expressing itself in the form of a ...song! A song of their invention, complete with words and melody! It was both times in French, my mother tongue. One of them went like this:

'One says "yes" to Thy Light of Love,
One says "yes" to Thee, oh Lord..!'

Not at all like a solemn canticle, but just like a happy little love-song for their beloved 'Lord'.

There are three interesting points about the way they express themselves. First, the word 'One': in French it is a sort of collective plural, very close to 'we', but with a group-entity meaning to it, which seems to be exactly the way the cells feel - at least those in the groups that are the most awakened already, while some other groups in other areas of the body are felt more like an amorphous mass, only rarely capable of a conscious reaction. Even in the more awake cells the consciousness is not individualized yet like ours, but still semi-collective. Actually, they sounded like a soft-voiced choir of small kids, with so many little voices in unison. It was so sweet and moving!

The second point is that the cells perceive the Divine, understandably enough, in their own physical manner: for them, the Divine is essentially Light; Light which is at the same time Love, but Light first nevertheless. I have realized through some other experiences that our body is an obscure place indeed; it is rather dark in there. A loving Light must be quite welcome.

And the third point is about the 'Yes'. It expresses for the cells not just a word, but the very physical attitude of welcome which they take for that Light, and attitude of openness to it; just as a hand can be clenched into a fist, or wide open, just as flowers can be closed when hard buds, and then bloom open under the sun, in the same way the cells can open themselves, and that is their way to say 'Yes' - and that, too, like their closed-up 'No', has biological consequences, but quite beneficial this time. And one can feel it!

I am trying to give an idea of what might be going on nowadays in quite a few people's bodies, in Auroville and elsewhere; for, if one is receptive enough, it can be contagious! Those 'doors' which Sri Aurobindo described as 'hard to force' in the opening quotation of this article, he himself quietly forced them open for all of us; and after him, Mother too took upon herself the heroic task of patiently teaching the cells of her own body to receive properly the new Divine Force at work since 1956 in the Earth's atmosphere and substance, for the next evolutionary step: a new humanity, spiritualized and transformed permanently, down to its very

cells. I have read with fascination and awe the 13 volumes of *Mother's Agenda*, the fantastic and often deeply moving record kept by her confidant Satprem, of what she, and her body-cells, accepted to go through, from 1950 to 1973, to prepare the way for all of us human beings towards our happier evolutionary future.

The same divine Nature

There is just one more point I must add here, to give a fuller picture of the general process that seems to take place: *bhakti* is only one of the states of consciousness needed to reestablish the full contact between us and our divine Reality. We may start by thus falling in love with the Divine, as if It were other than our own true self, but we must at some point come to realize (it must become 'real' for us) that we ourselves, and everything there is, are nothing but the innumerable forms of the one and only Divine Person there is, in His/Her fantastic Game of Multiplicity and Evolution. So, we too are the very same Divine Being we are in love with! Only, here, we are 'The Divine-playing-at-Evolution', that is, growing for the sheer joy of it, and becoming more and more conscious of Itself again; while what we are in love with, is the Supreme and Absolute Divine, eternally in full conscious possession of Its own Consciousness, Power and Bliss - the same divine Nature which is also secretly our own, but which we come here again and again to learn how to experience ever more, even in this difficult physical world.

This paradox of being consciously the Divine, and at the same time being in love with the Divine, exists only for our mind. In the actual spiritual experience of this Love-in-Identity (which several mystics of the West also had but were forced by their Church to deny as blasphemous) there is no paradox, only the most delightful (and humorous!) sense of completeness in the bliss of the Game: one keeps a sense of difference, simply 'for the joy of that "Thee"', as Mother smilingly put it.

In my own inner development then, a time came when I myself grew into that especially blissful dual experience. In the same way, along with their usual *bhakti*, my cells - as also Mother's cells before - started to outgrow their sense of littleness and incapacity. They have discovered in themselves, oh wonderful irony, the joy of challenge and of adventure which was so foreign to them before. More and more often now, in front of a difficulty, they galvanize themselves joyfully with a war-cry-like formula of their own: 'On peut!' (We/One can!)

There is indeed an extraordinary bliss in feeling in oneself and in the rest of the world the gradual but irresistible emergence of the Divine Reality behind it all; it is that fabulous cosmic Bliss-of-the-Power-to-Progress, as Mother describes it, which is in fact the dynamic Force behind the phenomenon of evolution. That some obscure cells in one human body or another are now able to experience such things, even if only sometimes as yet, is already fantastic enough to prove that, indeed, the times, they are a-changing!

All this has become somehow normal to me, because it feels so natural to have that sweet, intimate and even humorous relationship with all these little cells who are now growing along with us in this great adventure of evolution. I am so happy for them! Yet I am still amazed that it could be happening to me. The new contagion started by Mother which saw its first effects in other people here and there already in the sixties, must have become really powerful! Or is it sheer Divine Grace? Anyway, I hope this article will be an encouragement for those who, as I did in 1972, will answer a joyous Yes! to Mother's call to all of us human beings:

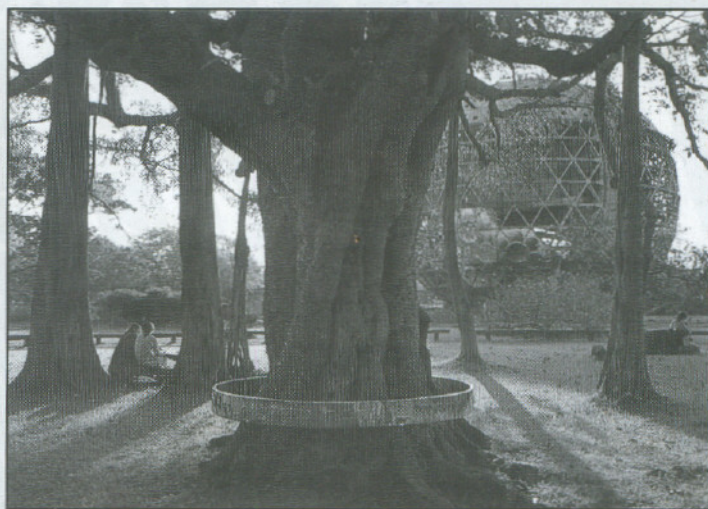
'The world is preparing for a big change. Will you help?' ●



The Mother

Bhaga was a teacher in France before moving to live in Auroville in 1972. Currently she is creating educational material on evolution in the light of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's work, and providing an information service for this through the Laboratory of Evolution, the specialized library and research unit which she founded. She is the author of *The Magic Child or How It All Got Started* (Auroville: CRCP, 1985). Further information from: Auroville Information UK, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, India; and from Auroville International UK, Canigou, Cot Lane, Childbam, W. Sussex PO18 8SP, Tel/Fax: 01243 574099.

*The next evolutionary step:
a new humanity, spiritualized
and transformed permanently,
down to its very cells*



The sacred Banyan Tree in front of the Matrimandir (spiritual centre building in Auroville).