RITAM
A bi-annual journal of material and spiritual researches in Auroville

Our aim:

• This is a journal under SAIIER connecting the various units under its umbrella, with the focus on education and other related areas of research.

• The purpose is to create a space where we express and share our work in Auroville and also invite others to share their perceptions with a view to look at where we stand with reference to the ideal.

• It will publish articles, interviews etc. which are relevant to the Charter of Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as those from elsewhere.

• This journal is for both Aurovilians as well as others who are looking to Auroville for pioneering work in many fields.

• The goal is to understand better the spirit of Auroville and in that context what we are doing and what further we can do.
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Please email us at saiier@auroville.org.in with your views and for any other information. We hope you enjoy this issue!

Editor

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From the point of view of form, in what way is man superior to the animals?

Sri Aurobindo speaks of the form that is capable of manifesting the Spirit. The very nature of the manifestation of the Spirit is consciousness, understanding and finally mastery. It is obvious that from the point of view of aesthetics and purely physical appearance, one may find certain animal forms beautiful and perhaps even more beautiful than the human form in its present state of... degeneration, I believe. There were periods when the human race seems to have been more beautiful and harmonious; but as a means of expression of the Spirit, its superiority is beyond the shadow of a doubt. For the mere fact that man stands upright is symbolic of the capacity to look at things from above. He dominates what he sees instead of always having his nose to the ground. Of course, it may be said that birds fly, but with wings it is difficult to have a means of intellectual self expression!

This upright position is very symbolic. If you try to walk on all fours, you will see that this position with the eyes and nose necessarily turned to the ground does not give you the feeling that you are looking at things from another plane or even from above. The whole structure of the human body is made to express a mental life. The proportions of the brain, for instance, the structure of the human head, the structure of the arms and hands, all that, from the point of view of the expression of the Spirit, is unquestionably altogether superior and it seems to have been conceived and built exclusively for the purpose of expressing intelligence.

Certainly from the point of view of strength, of suppleness, of agility, man is not the most gifted of animals, but for expressing the Spirit no other animal can be compared with him. Everything is made with this in view. We may wish to add to this possibility other things which seem to have been sacrificed just for the sake of the mental life—but also precisely because of this capacity of expressing a mental life man is able to develop in himself faculties which are only latent. Man has a power to educate: his body can be developed, educated. He can increase certain faculties. You cannot imagine any animal, even among those we most admire, which is capable, for instance, of physical education, purely physical—I am not speaking of going to school or learning things, but purely physical education, a systematic development of the muscles. The animal is born and makes good use of what it has and it grows according to its own law, but it does not educate itself or does it in a very rudimentary way, in an extremely limited field; whereas by a normal and systematic development man can remedy his defects and shortcomings. Man is certainly, in an organised way, the first progressive animal who can augment his capacities, his possibilities, increase his faculties and acquire things that he did not have spontaneously. There is not one animal which can do that.

Yes, under man’s influence some animals have learnt movements they did not make spontaneously, but that is still under man’s influence. Certainly without men dogs or horses would never have learnt to do what they have learnt through contact with man. So, it is obvious that the human physical form is the most appropriate one for expressing the Spirit. It may seem inadequate to us, but precisely we feel we are capable of drawing out from
our bodies more than they would have given spontaneously without an educating will. And with this possibility of expressing intelligence, observation, comprehension, deduction—all the mental qualities—man has gradually learnt to understand the laws of Nature and tried not only to understand them but master them.

If we compare what he is with the higher being living in the Truth which we want to become, we may obviously speak about man as he is at present in a very derogatory fashion and complain of his imperfection. But if we put ourselves in the place of the animals which immediately precede him in the evolution, we see that he is endowed with possibilities and powers which the others are quite incapable of expressing. The mere fact of having the ambition, the desire, the will to know the laws of Nature and to master them sufficiently to be able to adapt them to his needs and change them to a certain extent, is something impossible, unthinkable for any animal.

**But, Mother, then the question arises:** Does the descent of the consciousness develop the form or is it the development of the form that compels the descent of a higher consciousness?

There would be no universe without the descent of consciousness. Where would your universe begin, and with what?

**In the case of man, did the animal man bring down the mind or was it the descent of mind...**

Oh! You mean: Is it something in the intermediary being or in the higher ape which by its aspiration called down the mind? But the aspiration itself is the result of a previous descent.

It is quite obvious that nothing can be manifested which is not previously contained in what exists. One can’t bring something out of nothing. One can make what is there emerge, manifest, express itself, develop; but if nothing had been there, nothing would ever have come out. All progress, all perfection is the result of an inner effort of “something” that is present and seeks to manifest. That is to say, absolutely, the principle comes first and the expression afterwards. If there were not an eternal principle, if there were not—we can give it all the names we like, can’t we?—a Supreme Reality, there would never have been a universe, because nothing comes out of nothing.

There is or was a whole period in the development of the human mind in which men tried very seriously to prove that it was the perfecting of Matter which produced the Spirit. But that is nonsense! *(Mother laughs).* The least of your activities, all that you do, is a clear proof that first you conceive and then you do, even on a very small scale. A life which is not the result of a conscious will would be a completely incoherent life. I mean that if Nature were not a conscious force and a conscious will with a conscious aim, nothing could ever have been organised. We have just to observe a little, even in the very small field of observation we have in our individual life, to be completely convinced of it. …

It could be said that the mastery of fire is the symbolic human superiority. Wherever there is man, a fire is lit.

The two things that are clearly superior to animal activities are the faculty of writing and the possibility of articulate speech. And this is something so clearly superior that all sufficiently developed animals are extremely sensitive to articulate speech; it fascinates them. If you speak in a very clear, very modulated, very well articulated way to a wild animal, it is immediately attracted, truly fascinated—I am not speaking of those which have lived close to man, but precisely of animals which have never met man before. They listen immediately, they feel the superior power that is being expressed.

*(CWM 9:219-22)*
The Strength of Stillness

Sri Aurobindo

There are two great forces in the universe, silence and speech. Silence prepares, speech creates. Silence acts, speech gives the impulse to action. Silence compels, speech persuades. The immense and inscrutable processes of the world all perfect themselves within, in a deep and august silence, covered by a noisy and misleading surface of sound—the stir of innumerable waves above, the fathomless resistless mass of the ocean’s waters below. Men see the waves, they hear the rumour and the thousand voices and by these they judge the course of the future and the heart of God’s intention; but in nine cases out of ten they misjudge. Therefore it is said that in History it is always the unexpected that happens. But it would not be the unexpected if men could turn their eyes from superficies and look into substance, if they accustomed themselves to put aside appearances and penetrate beyond them to the secret and disguised reality, if they ceased listening to the noise of life and listened rather to its silence.

The greatest exertions are made with the breath held in; the faster the breathing, the more the dissipation of energy. He who in action can cease from breathing,—naturally, spontaneously,—is the master of Prana, the energy that acts and creates throughout the universe. It is a common experience of the Yogin that when thought ceases, breathing ceases,—the entire kumbhak effected by the Hathayogin with infinite trouble and gigantic effort, establishes itself easily and happily,—but when thought begins again, the breath resumes its activity. But when the thought flows without the resumption of the inbreathing and outbreathing, then the Prana is truly conquered. This is a law of Nature.

When we strive to act, the forces of Nature do their will with us; when we grow still, we become their master. But there are two kinds of stillness—the helpless stillness of inertia, which heralds dissolution, and the stillness of assured sovereignty which commands the harmony of life. It is the sovereign stillness which is the calm of the Yogin. The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action.

In this calm, right knowledge comes. The thoughts of men are a tangle of truth and falsehood, satyam and anr̄t̄am. True perception is marred and clouded by false perception, true judgment lamed by false judgment, true imagination distorted by false imagination, true memory deceived by false memory. The activity of the mind must cease, the chitta be purified, a silence fall upon the restlessness of Prakriti, then in that calm, in that voiceless stillness illumination comes upon the mind, error begins to fall away and, so long as desire does not stir again, clarity establishes itself in the higher stratum of the consciousness compelling peace and joy in the lower. Right knowledge becomes the infallible source of right action. Yogah̄ karmasu kauśalam.

The knowledge of the Yogin is not the knowledge of the average desire-driven mind. Neither is it the knowledge of the scientific or of the worldly-wise reason which anchors itself on surface facts and leans upon experience and probability. The Yogin knows God’s way of working and is aware that the improbable often happens, that facts mislead. He rises above reason to that direct and illuminated knowledge which we call vijñānam. The desire-driven mind is emmeshed
in the intricate tangle of good and evil, of the pleasant and the unpleasant, of happiness and misfortune. It strives to have the good always, the pleasant always, the happiness always. It is elated by fortunate happenings, disturbed and unnerved by their opposite. But the illuminated eye of the seer perceives that all leads to good; for God is all and God is sarvamanāgalam. He knows that the apparent evil is often the shortest way to the good, the unpleasant indispensable to prepare the pleasant, misfortune the condition of obtaining a more perfect happiness. His intellect is delivered from enslavement to the dualities.

Therefore the action of the Yogin will not be as the action of the ordinary man. He will often seem to acquiesce in evil, to avoid the chance of relieving misfortune, to refuse his assent to the efforts of the noble-hearted who withstand violence and wickedness; he will seem to be acting piśācavat. Or men will think him jāda, inert, a stone, a block, because he is passive, where activity appears to be called for; silent, where men expect voicefulness; unmoved, where there is reason for deep and passionate feeling. When he acts, men will call him unmatta, a madman, eccentric or idiot; for his actions will often seem to have no definite result or purpose, to be wild, unregulated, regardless of sense and probability or inspired by a purpose and a vision which is not for this world. And it is true that he follows a light which other men do not possess or would even call darkness; that what is a dream to them, is to him a reality; that their night is his day. And this is the root of the difference that, while they reason, he knows.

To be capable of silence, stillness, illuminated passivity is to be fit for immortality—amṛtatvāya kalpate. It is to be dhīra, the ideal of our ancient civilisation, which does not mean to be tamasic, inert and a block. The inaction of the tamasic man is a stumbling-block to the energies around him, the inaction of the Yogin creates, preserves and destroys; his action is dynamic with the direct, stupendous driving-power of great natural forces. It is a stillness within often covered by a ripple of talk and activity without,—the ocean with its lively surface of waves. But even as men do not see the reality of God’s workings from the superficial noise of the world and its passing events, for they are hidden beneath that cover, so also shall they fail to understand the action of the Yogin, for he is different within from what he is outside. The strength of noise and activity is, doubtless, great,—did not the walls of Jericho fall by the force of noise? But infinite is the strength of the stillness and the silence, in which great forces prepare for action.

(CWSA 13:57)
Similarities between Sumerian Enki and Vedic Agni

Jean-Yves Lung

In my researches on comparative mythologies, I have come across many similarities between Vedic India, Mesopotamia and Egypt. In all these cultures, the double liberation of the Sun and Waters occupy a prominent place and appear to be, as in the Vedas, the two pillars of their mythological architecture. But the most striking similarity was found between the Vedic god of the Fire Agni and the Mesopotamian Enki (Sumerian) or Ea (Akkadian). We will first present the iconographic representations of Enki/Ea in the cylinder-seals of Mesopotamia (Sumer, Akkad and Assyria) and then turn to the images used to describe Agni in the Veda.

In Mesopotamian literature, from Sumer to Akkad and Assyria, Enki/Ea is the god of the underground Waters. He created the human race to help the gods digging the channels for the release of the rivers. He is the intermediary between the gods and the human beings and generally favors the latter. As the god of sweet waters, he is connected to the rivers, which carry in themselves discernment and judgment. He is at the origin of the flowing of the Tigris and Euphrates, created by his fertilizing power. His abode is the Abzu or Apsû, the underground water. As the god of knowledge, he is the most intelligent and the most expert.

Images of Enki/Ea on Mesopotamian Cylinder Seals

Enki in his abode of the lower waters (Apsû)
Enki’s abode is the lower waters (Sumerian Abzu; Akkadian Apsû). He is represented here standing, ready to come out.

Enki releasing the waters
He has the power to release the waters, which on this seal represent the stream of knowledge and wisdom.
**Enki and the fishes**  
Fishes are often represented swimming up the flow of waters that descend from Enki’s shoulders. On the left, the symbol of the sun is visible above two praying figures. A king with a scourge masters an enemy.

**Enki’s assistants, the wise fish-men, Apkallu**  
The fish is also the symbol of Enki’s assistants, the seven *Apkallu*, sages and experts, “created in the river” (one of them is named “Utuabzu”, the Sun in or of the Abzu).

**Enki the fish-goat, Capricorn**  
Enki’s symbolic animals are the fish, the mountain goat, or the two joined into the Capricorn, the goat-fish. On the right, we can see a goat under Enki’s feet while fishes are swimming up the water flowing out of the god.
Enki, the ascending mountain-goat
The mountain-goat is always shown ascending the mountain (symbolized by rocks) towards what is called “the tree of life”, as if to reach out for its flowers. The mountain-goat is sometimes winged.

Enki as a Tree or a Pole
In some texts, Enki is also compared to a tree rooted in the Apsû, extending itself in the sky, covering all the countries. On the seals, we find such a vertical symbol, tree or pole, emerging from a rocky ground or a mountain, supporting the rising winged sun.

The Tree on the Mountain
Here, two gods (one with a human form, the other half animal) master two bulls ascending towards the Tree planted on the Mountain.
The Tree and the Sunrise
The sunrise is assisted by two creatures. It can be two mountain-goats, two wise fish-men, *apkallu*, or two men assisted by two purifying winged deities.

The Sun god in the Mountain
A god, (probably Shamash the Sun-god) lies helplessly inside the mountain. Another god awakes him, in the presence of the goddess Ishtar (right). Then, the god emerges mastering an animal (left).

Enki assisting the liberation of the Sun
On the seal of Adda, where the waters flow downward from his shoulders, with fishes swimming up the two streams, Enki is associated with the sun rising out of the twin mountains in the presence of Inanna/Ishtar (the morning star Venus) and another god.

The Sun requesting Enki in his Abode of Water
Here, a god of Fire (center) and the Sun God Utu/Shamash (left) come to Enki seated in the Apsû. The lifted hand is a sign of prayer or request. The Sun god steps on vanquished enemies and the god of Fire steps on the mountain.
The two liberations coincide
On an Assyrian seal, we see the two liberations, of the waters and of the sun, closely associated as if in one event: the rising of the sun supported by the star goddess Ishtar (the morning star Venus) coincides with the joining of the waters from above with the waters from below, in the presence of two apkallu.

Summary
The cylinder seals above convey a general meaning: We see the liberation of the waters and of the sun celebrated and interconnected, with the goddess Ishtar as an active element making them possible; we see the victory over the mountain associated with them, with the sun god imprisoned in it and coming out or stepping on it when it rises or fighting the demon who leans on the mountain; we see Enki/Ea stepping on the mountain to assist the rising of the sun and we see Enki symbolized by a pillar or a tree rooted on the mountain and ascending towards the rising sun or supporting its rising; we see Enki as the mountain goat stepping on the mountain and climbing what is commonly called “the Tree of Life”. If these images do not evoke any coherent meaning for the Assyriologists, they are immediately reminiscent of Vedic mythology to whomever is familiar with it: the ascent of man through the double liberation of the sun and the waters with Agni/Enki playing a key role.

Mesopotamian Enki and Vedic Agni: Similarities
Enki/Ea, the Ascending God of Mesopotamia, characteristics
From the pictures above, we can draw some conclusions about Enki’s role as a god: residing first in the lower waters, he enters the movement of a fish swimming up the stream towards the original source; as a mountain goat, he is the same ascending force climbing the mountain and the tree reaching out for its flowers; as a winged mountain-goat he has access to the sky itself, where the sun rises. He seems therefore to symbolise the hidden deity successively awakening in the waters, then earth and sky, in an ascending movement. In his full awakening (which seems connected to the liberation of the sun at dawn), he pours the waters from above, whose streams join with the waters from below. It is significant that in Mesopotamian mythology, Enki/Ea is the god of wisdom, knowledge and the god of all skills.

Connections with Agni
(Vedic verses translated by Sri Aurobindo)
All this is very reminiscent of the Vedic deity Agni, who is also connected with the waters and with knowledge, and is the link between men and gods. He breathes in the Waters (apsû), then becomes a galloping horse and then a swan in his ascending awakening towards the solar world.

He is also the son of the waters and of the trees, sometimes is himself called a tree (vanaspati):

O Tree (or: Master of delight – vanaspati), release thy yields to the gods (III, 4,10 & VII, 2,10).
O felicitous Fire, of thee are all felicities and they grow wide from thee like branches from a tree (VI, 13, 1).
O Fire, other fires dwell dependent on thee as on a tree its branches (VIII, 19, 33).
Its flames are compared to branches to be climbed:

The man who knows the law of his workings that are steadfast for ever, climbs them one by one like branches (II, 5, 4).
The seven far-flowing rivers climbed from him like branches (VI, 7, 6).

He is associated with the rising of the sun, and compared to a pillar holding the sky or heaven:

New-born he stands up high like a pole well planted and firm (IV, 6, 3).
He props up the firmament like a pillar (IV, 5, 1).
Pillaring the high lifted light of the sun (at dawn) (X, 3, 2).

He is nurtured by the seven rivers, born from them and setting them in movement, uniting the solar waters from above with the waters from below:

Thou goest towards the ocean of the sky... towards the waters that abide above in the luminous world of the sun and the waters that are below (III, 22, 3).
(He) gathered wealth from the nether and upper ocean (VII, 6, 7).
Let thy fires that dwell in the waters joining with those that descend the slopes accept the sacrifice (III, 22, 4).

Agni is always presented as having an inner discernment or understanding, dakṣaḥ; he is called a thinker and a sage (pracetās, vicetas) and a knower (vidvāḥ); sometimes, he is himself the guiding Thought, pramatiḥ. Like Enki, he is the intermediary and link between men and the gods and disposes rightly the sacrifice, giving to each god its share. There are other similarities: like Enki, he is the craftsman, the doer and accomplisher of all works. Like Enki, he knows the secret names of things.

Agni and the Goat
There is also a semantic connection of Agni with the goat and with an ascending curving movement: see the Sanskrit roots ank, to move in a curve; anj, to bend, go towards, request,

Here is a beautiful Persian sculpture from the 5th Century, showing how the mountain goat’s horns can be associated, in the mind of an artist, with the winding movement of ascending flames. Persia has adopted many Mesopotamian symbols, after having conquered the area in the 6th century BC.
worship; see the nouns ankurah, a germinating form, an offspring, angârah, charcoal, and ajah the goat, but also “the unborn”. We find the word associated with the image of Agni as a pillar in RV I.67.3: As the unborn (ajar na) he has held the wide earth, he has up-pillared heaven with his mantra of truth.

Enki/Abzu and Agni/apsu
The two key-words, Enki and Abzu, are said by Jean Bottéro, the French Assyriologist, to be of unknown etymology. It is striking that they are very close to the Vedic Agni and apsu (in the waters, locative plural of apah, the waters) and that the structural relation between Agni and apsu is the same as between Enki and Abzu: two hidden ascending gods with similar names sit in the watery abode designated with a similar word; both are associated to the sunrise and stand as a tree or a pillar. Considering that some mythological and psychological functions are also similar (particularly the link with knowledge and skill), it is very difficult to escape the hypothesis of a Vedic or maybe pre-Vedic input into the Sumerian civilisation.

This is reinforced by the fact that the Sumerians themselves considered that civilisation was brought to them from the East, maybe from the land of Dilmun (Bahrain), by seven wise fish-men swimming up the rivers from the sea, presented as Enki’s assistants or creatures.*

Agni being a god of Fire and Enki of Water, one could object to their brotherhood. But we find in Mesopotamian mythology two gods of Fire: Girra (Fire) and Nusku (the lamp), both born in the Apsû and holding some of Agni’s specific characteristics: fire and light of the house, lit in darkness, presenting offerings to the gods, assisting the Sun god, purifying, gods of light and warriors, always renewing themselves, and both sages and experts, as Enki their father. Moreover, Agni is closely related to the waters: first, he is râjâ apsu, the king in the waters, (RV, X, 45, 5), like Enki. He himself is like a river running in its channel and sends in his front the descending waters (RV, I.66.5) and connects the waters from above with those from below: Thou goest towards the ocean of the sky... towards the waters that abide above in the luminous world of the sun and the waters that are below. Let thy fire that dwells in the waters joining with those that descend accept the sacrifice. (RV, III.22.3&4). And also Thou art like a fountain in the desert to the longing man (RV, X.4.1).

To take Agni as the name of the ritual fire only is to mistake the signifier for the signified. He is many things: a flame, a stream, a bird, a tree, a boat, a lion, a horse, a chariot, a craftsman, a thinker, a warrior, a sage and a knower, a seer and a will, often the seer-will (kavikratu), and he fulfills many functions: messenger, guest, priest of the call, bringer of the oblation, knower of all things born, friend and leader of the human people, fosterer, purifier, and none of these exhaust his reality, for he is said to have many names and to be manifold in his forms. But he is always connected with the truth, satyam, ritam, possessing the truth, ritavân, a feature that his simili Enki seems to have lost in Mesopotamian written literature (the only one that survived in some forms), where he appears more clever than truthful.

What is common to both Agni and Enki is their representation of a hidden god awakening progressively to different planes of being (as fish, mountain-goat then winged goat for Enki, as fire, horse then swan for Agni) and represented as an ascending force. The outer symbols of water and fire are only images used to convey this underlying meaning. The common pattern is the outflowing or upflaming of the hidden deity, which is why

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* Cf. Sethna, Karpasa
both can be represented by a tree: the tree is a symbol of an ascending and unfolding movement linking the underground waters to the sun. We find in the Vedic and Mesopotamian system of images a similar underlying structure: the liberation of the sun and waters is the main architecture. The fact that the symbolic vocabulary (the signifiers) is proper to each culture implies that the initial input (the signified) has been reinterpreted in the terms of the Mesopotamian physical milieu, or that both cultures had a common origin, maybe referring to what the Vedas call the forefathers (see the similarities between the seven *Angirases* and the seven *Apkallu*, servants of Agni and Enki, respectively). This, of course, supposes that a Vedic or pre-Vedic culture was not brought to North India around 1500 BC by invading Aryans but was already in the area in the fifth millennium, when the Sumerian culture constituted itself.

It is very striking that the Mesopotamian cylinder-seals display the closest and oldest iconographic representation available of some of the main Vedic images. This generally escapes the attention of the Assyriologists who have no knowledge of the Vedic material, still less of Sri Aurobindo's psychological interpretation of the Vedic corpus. Going further in this study would require a pluridisciplinary approach, which is not favoured by the present overspecialisation of scholarship in this field.

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He is a regular contributor to Ritam and a collaborator of La Revue de l'Inde (l'Harmattan, France).
As far back as I can remember, I have always been interested in working with young people and helping them to develop their potential. It is this interest which led me to study psychology during graduation and post graduation levels. Six years ago, the same interest led me to take up my first assignment as an English teacher in Udavi school, a school for children from the surrounding villages of Auroville, even though I had not received any formal training in education. For me it was an opportunity to work closely with children and to understand them and, I hoped, to help them grow towards becoming complete and self-actualized adults.

As I grew in my teaching experience, I realized more and more that it was not easy to reach the aims that had attracted me to take up this work. Imparting information and finding interesting things to do for children was not my only purpose. I wanted to go to another level. For me it was important to help the child move in the direction of self-knowledge. I consider this as the first step towards self development.

In a traditional class room set up, I tried my own experiments in this direction and my search for a more effective tool to reach that aim intensified. It was during this search that I came across Play of Painting.

In March 2008 I attended a conference by Arno Stern in Auroville and learned about Play of Painting. I was immediately taken by the concept and Arno Stern’s own philosophy of education. He stressed the importance of the child’s innate personality and needs; he was completely against the idea of any judgment or imposition on the child. It was an eye opener to see that he had not sent either of his children to any educational institution but gave them an opportunity to grow and develop guided by their needs and at their own pace.

From teacher to servant: a personal experience with ‘Play of Painting’

Payal Adhikari
His conference inspired me to take up the work of a ‘servant’ or practitioner of Play of Painting because it seemed so much in line with my own ideas towards self-development. Luckily, a colleague had already started the program in the school and I volunteered as a servant.

**Play of Painting**
Play of Painting is a special method discovered, developed and researched by Arno Stern that involves a free play with colours using painting as the medium by participants, occurring in a special set of conditions. These have been specified by Arno Stern as follows:

- It is conducted in a closed space where the participant is not influenced by any external stimuli or person.
- It is a group activity. Others are present as playmates, engaged in the similar task of painting. The participants are not to communicate with each other about the painting but an informal interaction is permissible.
- It is facilitated by a practitioner who Arno Stern calls a 'servant'. The servant’s task is to serve the painters. He/she makes sure that the materials and conditions for play are maintained. He/she does not influence the painter or serve as a reference figure in any way.

According to Arno Stern, ‘Formulation’ is an important result of this play. Formulation is a repertoire of figures that emerge from the painter; it is not art. It emerges from an inner necessity of the individual and is a programmed development. The practice of Formulation is not a therapy but a process having positive results on growth and development as it releases images from a human being’s deep organic memory. It is not limited to any age group and is accompanied by a deep pleasure.

During the Play of Painting session the child is left in front of a white sheet of paper, on which he can paint what he wants. There are some basic rules pertaining to the use of paints and other materials but the content is totally dependant on the painter. He works (or plays) in a structured external environment and has complete freedom to paint what he likes.

**The early sessions in school**
The Play of Painting program in its current form has been running in our school for more
than a year now. My two colleagues (who also attended Arno Stern’s conference) and I offer it to all students from class 7th to 9th standard; each student attends the session once a week. Unable to find a space for it during normal school hours we conduct this program in the morning from 7.30 to 8.30 am prior to the commencement of the school day. I have been servicing two groups of students from our school for a year now. These students were already known to me as I had been teaching them English. The children, 11 to 16 years old, were from different classes. According to Arno Stern it is important to have a mixed age group with both adults and children in a single session.

I remember the first few sessions of Play of Painting at Udavi where the children came in to a completely new set up and were not accustomed at all to the conditions of the play. The children from 7th to 9th standard had a background of traditional or at least semi-traditional classrooms where the subject, the content and the means of studying were specified by the teacher. And so, when they came in they expected guidelines as to what to do and how to do it. I think it was a surprise for them (and even disconcerting for some) to learn a few rules about the use of materials and then be left free to paint as they wished.

I had many of these children standing in front of the paper with a brush in their hands, not knowing what to do. I got many surreptitious looks almost beseeching me to tell them what to do! In the absence of any stimulation from me, they had no option but to start painting. ‘Could they paint something on their own, without guidance from a teacher?’ Many started with what they had learned in their regular painting class. Beautiful kolums*, mountains, flowers, suns and scenery came alive on paper for weeks. Artistic ability was manifesting itself with vigour in those first few weeks. Those not blessed with artistic ability sought to represent what they knew best; for example, the school map, the map of India! Surely, I had the most patriotic students that India could hope for.

It was interesting to note that this artistic enthusiasm began to lose its vigour in the absence of appreciation from the ‘adult’ in the room. Irregularity and non-attendance by some was a sign of this loss of interest. But we did not allow this behaviour to continue and took measures because according to Arno Stern regularity is a must for the successful implementation of this program, especially in the early months; therefore, many of these children were again in front of the paper without their artistic enthusiasm, not knowing what to paint. In the absence of any external stimulation and with our insistence on attendance, a search began…

I think the question in the minds of those who had artistic ability would have been ‘Can we paint something for ourselves even though it is not appreciated by anybody or displayed anywhere?’

Those who were not artists experienced a relief when their paintings were not judged or corrected. The barrier of self-consciousness which separated them from this medium was disappearing and they began to paint freely.

At that point, I believe, the children began to search for something they could create only for themselves. Little by little an interest of a different kind began to grow; they did not have to paint to satisfy anyone else. I think each one slowly began to lose self-consciousness born out of the knowledge that he would not be judged on his work and in his own time began to discover his story to tell on the paper in front of him. They looked into their experience to bring forth something on the paper. Many times there seemed to be no premeditation on the painting. They just picked up the brush.

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*Kolum – Traditional South Indian designs created on the floors/entrances of homes with coloured powder. A task done mostly by daughters and wives of the household.
and painted without any objective in mind. They allowed the colours and images to flow spontaneously. I wondered whether this could be a first step towards moving beyond mental knowledge and accepting the presence of other inner processes.

As they settled more into the concept of the Play of Painting room, they began to experiment on their own, without any initiation from the servant. However, they did notice what the other participants were doing in the room and used that as a resource to experiment with. There was experimentation on themes, colours, mixing of colours, the size of the painting (the number of sheets that could be used), details that could be added to a painting and the brush strokes that could be used. Each one had his own path which he wanted to explore on the paper.

**Some individual observations**

Being their subject teacher I had known most of the students and was familiar with their behavior and attitude in a classroom setting. I did not use this knowledge to influence my behavior or service in the Play of Painting sessions, but it was there at the back of my mind allowing me to make some observations, which I would like to share.

In the sessions there were many girls who came from traditional backgrounds. They are not given much freedom at home and are raised to be obedient to their parents and future husbands/in-laws. These girls painted kolum after kolum (and flowers) for months on end. A few weeks before the end-of-school session (after 8-9 months of being in the painting session), I finally saw some gleam of experimentation by these girls. The basic structure of the kolum or flower was there, but there emerged subtle attempts to move to something else. They still held on to the form (of the kolum or flower) which was a safety net for them, but they were taking their first steps to explore other images. It set me wondering: could this openness to new things touch other areas of their life too? After months of repetition their exploration came in its own time without any initiation from me; the children were following their own inner necessity. In a more traditional class setting I would have been tempted to suggest new forms to paint, but definitely not in the Play of Painting sessions.

One eleven year old participant was a typical naughty boy whose favorite activities included falling out of trees and hunting small animals. This little boy was a pack of uncontrollable energy. It always pained me to ask him to concentrate in class; it seemed to be an artificial imposition on a young bundle of enthusiasm. How do you trap a free bird? I was at my wit’s end trying to figure how to channel his energy. Play of Painting was a real nightmare for this young fellow. To stand for minutes on end in front of a sheet of paper and paint was an impossibility. He could never stand still or even erect and was always leaning on something. He tried very hard to escape from attending the sessions. However, I was very firm with him and told him that he had to come but negotiated to free him whenever he wished to leave during the session. Initially, he stayed only for a few minutes and then left. With time, his stay in the room became longer. He still cannot stay a full hour and his attention is still sporadic, varying with his moods. But, I see concentration and attention growing in him, very slowly.

Another student who comes to mind was a fifteen-year-old. He was what we would call a ‘model student’, an all-rounder: good in sports, academics and extra-curricular activities. He once told me how important it was for him to set goals and succeed. Success was very important for him. He came conscientiously for the sessions and painted meticulously (re-creating images of Indian deities) because he thought it was a regular kind of class. Slowly, I could see that there was a growing frustration in him as his artistic skills were not being appreciated or compared to others. One day, I noticed he started to splash colours on the paper and nothing concrete was painted. This was followed by other similar
work. I think this was an important threshold. He seemed to be freeing himself from the chains created by the need for success. He was letting a natural movement express itself in the absence of a goal.

Then there was a child of eleven, who was often tardy in class and homework because he is academically behind others. I usually have a huge struggle with him to get anything accomplished and am constantly irritated by his ‘don’t care’ attitude. I was genuinely surprised to see him make a sincere effort to be on time for the Play of Painting sessions. He seemed to have a sense of mission. He was accomplishing a painting on which he had been working for weeks. The painting was definitely not an artistic creation in the traditional sense, but it seemed to be important to him. I have never seen him so concentrated and I thought to myself, “Why do I have to struggle with this fellow in class, when he obviously has the capacity to concentrate and complete tasks?”

It is however true that he shifted back to his nonchalant attitude until another painting caught his fancy.

I have often felt inadequate as a teacher with two girls from different classes. I always had the impression that they would rather be doing something far more interesting than what I could offer in English class. When they came to painting sessions, I saw them engrossed and working assiduously. One worked so hard on detailing her sheets. The other explored space and had a pleasure in using as many sheets as possible to complete a single painting. It was a realization for me to note that my lesson plans could not evoke the same preoccupation which I witnessed in the painting room. And there was a joy to see them thus pre-occupied and concentrated.

In a classroom I am limited by many constraints which do not allow me to customize my lesson plans with the needs of each child. The lesson plans are guided by an academic aim. The students are impelled (the system is such) to accept this aim and use me as a reference point to reach that aim. How often have I found a distance between my constructed aim for the child and his current state of being. How easy it has been for me to label a child as ‘slow’, ‘failure’ or ‘not hardworking’. And yet here was the same child showing all those qualities that I had longed for in the classroom. The difference was that the children had set their own aims and accomplished them in their own way without any interference from anybody.

As a servant I did not have the burden of judging the work of the children and comparing them to a standard set of norms. Despite my best efforts, the system compels me to have expectations from children and evaluate them. There is often a hurt look when I give negative feedback on written or oral work if it did not fare well with the expected standard. This was not asked of me in the painting session. It came as a relief. I enjoyed letting them be and not imposing my expectations on them.

However, having said this, I feel that teaching still provides one with good opportunities to work with children. I do not feel the need to stop teaching but I have become a different kind of teacher. I have become more accepting to the children. There is an increased sensitivity in me because in the painting room I have witnessed how each child has a different law of being and growth.

Some group observations
As I mentioned earlier the groups are mixed with children from different classes, age and sex. I also invited a few adults to paint regularly with the children. The participants are not allowed to comment on each others’ paintings. As a servant I don’t make any observations either, nor respond to participants’ observations of their painting.

The sessions can be very intense because there are 14-15 people in a small room sharing common materials and the servant has to ensure a smooth flow. The children are concentrated upon their work but at times there is informal chatter, jokes and laughter. And there is silence too. At the
moments of silence, the concentrated energy is almost tangible.

In the classroom, I have been a recipient of the demands of the children. Being the only teacher there, I found that I could give only a limited amount of attention and many felt left out. I noticed often that my attention tended to flow automatically to those who would demand most adamantly. The quieter ones shrank into the background. I was always conscious that I had not carried out my duty to all. Also, the nature of my attention was very ‘academic’ as I had academic goals to pursue while teaching English. Here, in the Play of Painting room, it was different; I was not on a pedestal, and I was not looked up to as a source of knowledge. I was a servant, making sure the pins were in place, the colour pots were filled, colours were mixed when required and water not dripping. To my surprise I enjoyed being at the beck and call of the children. If there was paint dripping, I had to run no matter what I was doing to stop the flow. I was forced to widen and intensify my attention to include all of them and their activities. I had to learn how to multi-task, prepare the paint for one and attach the pins for another all in one go. I could not exclude a single child; I had to cater to all needs. It was interesting that I was working with the very students who also saw me as a ‘teacher’ in their classroom. Naturally, they enjoyed ordering me around! The shouts of ‘Akka* paint’, ‘Akka mixing’, ‘Akka dripping’, ‘Akka finished’, ‘Akka I am waiting for the pins’! – still resound in my ear.

There are some children who I know need special affective attention from me in the classroom which I am unable to give them because of time constraints and the academic rigour. I am bound also by the norms of teacher-student relationship. One boy who I had taught for many years came to the painting sessions. I have always felt that he wanted more attention from me in the English classes. His language skills were not so good and he felt shy to demand attention in front of others. Here in the painting room, he was not fettered by his lack of confidence or my lack of time; he would call for my help for all kinds of things: ‘whether he could use a pot from the mixed colour table’, ‘whether I could wipe his wet hands’, ‘whether I could wash his brush which had mixed paint on it’. And I gave my service and my attention. I gave it freely, knowing that it was his way of reaching out to me; his way of maintaining a contact with me in a way not possible in regular class.

My own experience as a painter
I remember my art class in school with a feeling of trepidation even now. Most vivid is an ‘Art Exam’ fifteen years ago. At the end of the exam session, I looked at my paper and cringed – a big vase with round balls in it. “Was this the best I could come up with?” Trying my best to hide the ‘masterpiece’, I handed it over to the supervisor, shrinking with shame at my inadequacy. That was it; from that day on I labeled myself as a non-artist with no aesthetic ability. I shut myself up against anything remotely connected with art or aesthetics. But, I remember my notebooks from school and college days – filled with squiggles, collages and abstract designs. During the long lectures, I think I spent my most concentrated time squiggling on the paper. Where did this need come from? Why was it there?

Now, many years later, after Arno Stern’s conference I decided to go to the painting session conducted by a colleague in school with my English students as my playmates. When I approached the Play of Painting room as a painter, I was filled with opposing feelings. I knew I could not paint, but within me, there was this excitement to explore a medium which was still fascinating to me, but from which I had been rudely cut off years ago. I experienced a fascinating and controlled freedom in the

*Akka – Tamil word for elder sister. The children in Udavi refer to teachers as ‘elder brother’ or ‘elder sister’ rather than the formal Sir/Madam.
room. Absence of judgment on me and my capabilities was such a sweet joy. It gave me liberty to experiment and explore forms, colours, images and my own unique preoccupations. For example, I am intrigued by boundaries, a strange and whimsical interest I agree, but there nevertheless. I saw myself painting squares and circles and trying to fill in the spaces without the paint spilling outside the borders. This was an absorbing process for me.

Sometimes, images would arise of their own accord and I would paint as if I were inwardly driven by something. There were some brush strokes that seemed to have an almost physically soothing effect on me. There were some geometric images that I wanted to repeat again and again; I would think about these images even outside the painting room and wait eagerly for a week before I could start painting them again. It was a necessity which I still cannot understand but know that it was important for me. And sometimes I created my own world on the paper, the images conveying only what I could understand, a language which only I could speak. I was not bound to include others. Others were present, yes, but busy in their worlds. Their presence made the activity a fun and happy process. A fixed time and day set aside for the activity was a help because then painting was not dependent on my whim and fancy. I have thoroughly enjoyed painting exclusively for myself and, like the children, I have done my own little experiments in a joyous and concentrated manner.

After a year as a servant I feel enriched because I finally have a tool which can help me come closer to my aim of helping children grow according to their inner necessities. As a teacher I have a role to play and work to do, necessary in today’s reality. At the same time I can offer something more through the painting sessions. No matter with how much goodwill I enter the classroom, the lessons and aims are mine and based on my perceptions of what is needed. Sometimes these perceptions are in tandem with the child’s need and sometimes they are not. It is obvious that there will be a loss of interest if my perceptions are not in accord with their true needs; then the child has to artificially create that interest in himself to keep up with the educational pressures and social requirements. He has to suppress his preoccupations and interests because he is not the one deciding what to do in class. During the painting sessions, I am not imposing my personality, my thoughts, my knowledge or my lesson plans on the children. When there is no imposition from outside, the children move at their own pace. I am not creating or prolonging any experience for them nor am I cutting short any experience. They create their own experiences and stay with them as long as it is necessary. The result is an organic movement of consciousness, surely leading to something positive.

Payal Adhikari has been teaching for seven years in Udavi School / Auroville.
Ikebana - the Japanese art of flower arranging – has been my passion for the last 17 years. My discovery of this beautiful and profound art in Japan literally saved my life. I had been living there with my husband Kenji who is Japanese, and after a few months I became depressed and withdrawn. I am Italian, people say very much a typical Italian, and in Japan I gradually felt I could not express my true Italian nature. In 1987 it was still an isolated culture and to me it was like Planet Japan, not far from the Moon. At first the Japanese culture fascinated me with its attention to detail, its formality and lack of outward emotion; their daily writing was a calligraphy, their cooking a visual feast, their very movements a tiny ballet. I tried to become Japanese but I felt rude and clumsy, like an elephant in a china shop. I was always laughing too loudly, moving too clumsily amongst these dainty and precise people. In my 14 years there I never saw anyone being rude or vulgar. I felt as if I was living in a small box, and eventually, as if I was losing myself.

One day I went to an Ikebana exhibition and was overwhelmed by the strange beauty of the stark flower arrangements. It was as if I had been given a key to Japan. “I would love to do that – it must be quite easy,” I thought, and paid for three months of classes. I wanted to only pay for one month as I thought I would master it in that time, but the teacher quietly rejected my suggestion. She asked her students to do an arrangement based on three elements with three stems. Mine took me half an hour and then collapsed, so I quickly reassembled it. I chatted with a humble-looking lady quietly working on her arrangement next to me, and asked her if she was a beginner also. “Yes”, she said, very sincerely. “I have only been doing it for seven years”. I thought she must be handicapped. “You see that lady over there?” she delicately indicated, “She has been studying Ikebana for 17 years.” I began to feel confused. My arrangement looked pretty good to me; after all I come from the country of Leonardo and Michelangelo. Art, I thought, is in my blood!

The teacher came to look at my arrangement and gently said, “Do you mind if I make an adjustment?” She tweaked a stem and delicately stroked a twig and I suddenly saw how horrible my arrangement had been. It was through her touch in that moment that I saw what I had been unable to see before. I saw that we don’t see. I saw that with our ego we are blind. In a flash of understanding my ego was crushed. A single movement had changed my life.

Kenji and I had always wanted to live in India but somehow it took us 25 years to get here. I had been to Auroville as a guest and loved it, and came back in order to check out the possibilities of living here. It seemed the very last place in the world to teach Ikebana however, which was the only thing I wanted to do.

After being in Auroville for about one month I was walking under the eucalyptus trees one morning when I heard a sort of inner voice. I definitely heard: “Come and stay in Auroville and teach Ikebana.” At this time I did not know much about Mother and was quite unaware that she had spent four years in Japan. This experience convinced me that I should go back to Japan and study Ikebana seriously, get a diploma and become a qualified teacher.

That’s what I did, and for more than 9 years I took three lessons a week and did lots of practicing at
Ikebana is an ancient ritual art using flowers and plant material. It springs from a respect for nature deeply embedded within the Japanese culture. Like many other Japanese art forms, such as calligraphy, the tea ceremony and haiku poetry, Ikebana is a discipline based on a fundamental way of living – a “do” or philosophy.

In the West, Ikebana has sometimes been wrongly categorized as merely flower arranging, but doing so misses out on the subtlety, richness and depth of this ancient discipline. Through the arrangements we create, Ikebana strengthens our connection with nature, is a powerful means of self-expression and develops our ability to see in new ways.

It is a seasonal art form; in general, plant materials from different times of the year are rarely mixed. Ikebana also finds beauty in the transience of all things. Plant materials in all stages of life are used. The bud, seed pod, battered leaf and lichen on a branch all reflect the changing seasons and the cycle of life and death. Much of the floral symbolism in Ikebana derives from the principle that while plants change with the seasons, their innate quality remains constant. One of Ikebana’s most distinctive features is its use of space. In a design, space is just as important as the flowers and branches themselves. The practitioner seeks to create space rather than fill it. Space is an expressive part of the whole composition. It embraces the line and form of the individual plant materials, creating a dynamic tension. The observer’s imagination is encouraged to complete what is incomplete, to make perfect what is not.

Ikebana is a beautiful art of placement. Plant materials are carefully placed according to firm rules of angle and measurement. These rules were developed by the Japanese masters who were guided by both their study of nature and principles already employed in the visual arts – simplicity, expressiveness of line, asymmetry and the power of suggestion through understatement.

Great importance is given to the activity itself and the state of mind of the practitioner. Being relaxed yet focused is more important than enthusiasm, just as it is to work selflessly and with humility. Ikebana is a great way to deal with stress, and regular practice increases our ability to handle the events in our lives more resourcefully. It is a celebration of the connection between people and nature.

I also surprisingly became pregnant at the age of 42; so this delayed our return for another 3 years.

In 2001 we finally moved to Auroville. There seemed to be no flowers for Ikebana, no dishes or flower pins; the whole idea seemed ridiculous and doomed. But after only a few days Flame pottery told me they had received an Italian order for 12 Ikebana vases, and that they would make for me some suitable ones also. I started to give classes in Savitri Bhavan and had quite a good response.

At the beginning I taught as I had been taught to teach in Japan. Ikebana has a spiritual background and I could not imagine it being transmitted without this understanding. I had been trained...
to see my teacher as my guru, to completely surrender to her with no discussion or questions. We had learned to work very slowly and precisely and develop detachment. We concentrated very hard, then dismantled our arrangements at the end of the class. After a while of teaching in Auroville I realized this was unacceptable to most of my students and that I would have to change my method in order to survive. Here most people were in a hurry. They came on their big dusty bikes on their free afternoon and had to rush back to collect children or supervise workers. Several times I thought I would have to stop teaching as some aspects were too painful and frustrating for me. I knew I would have to change, but did not know if I was capable of changing. I asked myself many times why I had come to Auroville, why I was making myself undergo this struggle. What was this voice inside that was driving me?

We have now been here in Auroville for 8 years and I have established a regular Ikebana group who are little by little learning “what is Ikebana”. We hold the classes in a beautiful room in Creativity and there is deep concentration from the students. I was asked to start a class in Pondicherry but declined as the travelling and complications of setting up a classroom were too much. An Indian lady from Pondicherry who comes to our classes actually said, “No, no, please don’t have a class in the town. It is such a joy to do Ikebana here amongst the peace and the trees and the birds.”

Some time ago we again went back to Japan and I visited my old Ikebana school. Things had changed in my absence. Everything was different. The younger people seemed rather rough and impatient and were not doing the arrangements as I had been taught. I asked the teacher what had happened. She explained sadly, “We are now living in a different time. If I were strict like I was with you, then people would not come – and I cannot allow the school to be closed after 50 years.” I realized Japan had changed; globalization had swept through this previously isolated island. Many schools had been set up to teach Western-style flower arranging where one added instead of subtracted, thus creating huge colourful decorative pieces.

My dream now? To have an Ikebana School in Auroville one day. Students would come for a one week intensive residential course and be inspired by the message of Auroville at the same time, as well as its peace and beauty.

This dream would also include having cupboards for storing all the vases, branches, leaves and flowers needed. Now they are spread all over my small house, even under my bed. Here I have to find my own flowers, whatever the weather, and organize everything down to the smallest detail on my own; this is very time-consuming. In Japan the only thing my teacher would do was to pick up her scissors…

I am sure my dream will come true one day. Meanwhile, I am very happy creating and teaching Ikebana while living in this beautiful place.

Valeria Raso Matsumoto
Born in Sicily, Italy. Degree in Psychology at Padova University. After sailing 8 years around the world in a yacht, she lived in Japan for 14 years, where she was awarded a teacher’s degree for Ikebana and received the name Suiren (lotus blossom). She joined Auroville in 2001.
Nammalwar, the Supreme Vaishnava Saint and Poet

Sri Aurobindo

Maran, renowned as Nammalwar (“Our Saint”) among the Vaishnavas and the greatest of their saints and poets, was born in a small town called Kuruhur, in the southernmost region of the Tamil country—Tiru-nel-veli (Tinnevelly). His father, Kari, was a petty prince who paid tribute to the Pandyan King of Madura. We have no means of ascertaining the date of the Alwar's birth, as the traditional account is untrustworthy and full of inconsistencies. We are told that the infant was mute for several years after his birth. Nammalwar renounced the world early in life and spent his time singing and meditating on God under the shade of a tamarind tree by the side of the village temple.

It was under this tree that he was first seen by his disciple, the Alwar Madhura-kavi,—for the latter also is numbered among the great Twelve, “lost in the sea of Divine Love”. Tradition says that while Madhura-kavi was wandering in North India as a pilgrim, one night a strange light appeared to him in the sky and travelled towards the South. Doubtful at first what significance this phenomenon might have for him, its repetition during three consecutive nights convinced him that it was a divine summons and where this luminous sign led he must follow. Night after night he journeyed southwards till the guiding light came to Kuruhur and there disappeared. Learning of Nammalwar's spiritual greatness he thought that it was to him that the light had been leading him. But when he came to him, he found him absorbed in deep meditation with his eyes fast closed and although he waited for hours the Samadhi did not break until he took up a large stone and struck it against the ground violently. At the noise Nammalwar opened his eyes, but still remained silent. Madhura-kavi then put to him the following enigmatic question, “If the little one (the soul) is born into the dead thing (Matter)* what will the little one eat and where will the little one lie?” to which Nammalwar replied in an equally enigmatic style, “That will it eat and there will it lie.”

Subsequently Nammalwar permitted his disciple to live with him and it was Madhura-kavi who wrote down his songs as they were composed. Nammalwar died in his thirty-fifth year, but he has achieved so great a reputation that the Vaishnavas account him an incarnation of Vishnu himself, while others are only the mace, discus, conch etc. of the Deity.

From the philosophical and spiritual point of view, his poetry ranks among the highest in Tamil literature. But in point of literary excellence, there is a great inequality; for while some songs touch the level of the loftiest world-poets, others, even though rich in rhythm and expression, fall much below the poet's capacity.

In his great work known as the Tiru-vay-moli (the Sacred Utterance) which contains more than a thousand stanzas, he has touched all the phases of the life divine and given expression to all forms of spiritual experience. The pure and passionless Reason, the direct perception in the high solar realm of Truth itself, the ecstatic and sometimes poignant love that leaps into being at the vision of the “Beauty of God's face”, the final Triumph where unity is achieved and “I and my Father are one”—all these are uttered in his simple and flowing lines with a strength that is full of tenderness and truth.

The lines which we translate below are a fair specimen of the great Alwar's poetry; but it has suffered considerably in the translation,—indeed the genius of the Tamil tongue hardly permits of an effective rendering, so utterly divergent is it from that of the English language.

(CWSA 5 : 585)

* The form of the question reminds one of Epictetus' definition of man, “Thou art a little soul carrying about a corpse.” Some of our readers may be familiar with Swinburne's adaptation of the saying, “A little soul for a little bears up the corpse which is man.”


Nammalwar’s Hymn of the Golden Age

'Tis glory, glory, glory! For Life's hard curse has expired; swept out are Pain and Hell, and Death has nought to do here. Mark ye, the Iron Age shall end. For we have seen the hosts of Vishnu; richly do they enter in and chant His praise and dance and thrive.  

We have seen, we have seen, we have seen — seen things full sweet for our eyes. Come, all ye lovers of God, let us shout and dance for joy with oft-made surrenderings. Wide do they roam on earth singing songs and dancing, the hosts of Krishna who wears the cool and beautiful Tulsi, the desire of the Bees. 

The Iron Age shall change. It shall fade, it shall pass away. The gods shall be in our midst. The mighty Golden Age shall hold the earth and the flood of the highest Bliss shall swell. For the hosts of our dark-hued Lord, dark-hued like the cloud, dark-hued like the sea, widely they enter in, singing songs, and everywhere they have seized on their stations.

The hosts of our Lord who reclines on the sea of Vastness, behold them thronging hither. Me seems they will tear up all these weeds of grasping cults. And varied songs do they sing, our Lord's own hosts, as they dance falling, sitting, standing, marching, leaping, bending.

And many are the wondrous sights that strike mine eyes. As by magic have Vishnu's hosts come in and firmly placed themselves everywhere. Nor doubt it, ye fiends and demons, if, born such be in our midst, take heed! ye shall never escape. For the Spirit of Time will slay and fling you away.

These hosts of the Lord of the Discus, they are here to free this earth of the devourers of Life, Disease and Hunger and vengeful Hate and all other things of evil. And sweet are their songs as they leap and dance extending wide over earth. Go forth, ye lovers of God and meet these hosts divine; with right minds serve them and live.

The Gods that ye fix in your minds, in His name do they grant you deliverance. Even thus to immortality did the sage Marganda attain. I mean no offence to any, but there is no other God but Krishna. And let all your sacrifices be to them who are but His forms.

His forms he has placed as Gods to receive and taste the offerings that are brought in sacrifices in all the various worlds. He our divine Sovereign on whose mole-marked bosom the goddess Lakshmi rests —His hosts are singing sweetly and deign to increase on earth. O men, approach them, serve and live.

Go forth and live by serving our Lord, the deathless One. With your tongues chant ye the hymns, the sacred Riks of the Veda, nor err in the laws of wisdom. Oh, rich has become this earth in the blessed ones and the faithful who serve them with flowers and incense and sandal and water.

In all these rising worlds they have thronged and wide they spread, those beauteous forms of Krishna — the unclad Rudra is there, Indra, Brahma, all. The Iron Age shall cease to be — do ye but unite and serve these.

(CWSA 5 : 587-88)
Andal, the Vaishnava Poetess

Sri Aurobindo

Preoccupied from the earliest times with divine knowledge and religious aspiration the Indian mind has turned all forms of human life and emotion and all the phenomena of the universe into symbols and means by which the embodied soul may strive after and grasp the Supreme. Indian devotion has especially seized upon the most intimate human relations and made them stepping-stones to the supra-human. God the Guru, God the Master, God the Friend, God the Mother, God the Child, God the Self, each of these experiences—for to us they are more than merely ideas—it has carried to its extreme possibilities. But none of them has it pursued, embraced, sung with a more exultant passion of intimate realisation than the yearning for God the Lover, God the Beloved. It would seem as if this passionate human symbol were the natural culminating-point for the mounting flame of the soul's devotion: for it is found wherever that devotion has entered into the most secret shrine of the inner temple. We meet it in Islamic poetry; certain experiences of the Christian mystics repeat the forms and images with which we are familiar in the East, but usually with a certain timorousness foreign to the Eastern temperament. For the devotee who has once had this intense experience it is that which admits to the most profound and hidden mystery of the universe; for him the heart has the key of the last secret.

The work of a great Bengali poet has recently reintroduced this idea to the European mind, which has so much lost the memory of its old religious traditions as to welcome and wonder at it as a novel form of mystic self-expression. On the contrary it is ancient enough, like all things natural and eternal in the human soul. In Bengal a whole period of national poetry has been dominated by this single strain and it has inspired a religion and a philosophy. And in the Vaishnavism of the far South, in the songs of the Tamil Alwars we find it again in another form, giving a powerful and original turn to the images of our old classic poetry; for there it has been sung out by the rapt heart of a woman to the Heart of the Universe.

The Tamil word, Alwar, means one who has drowned, lost himself in the sea of the divine being. Among these canonised saints of Southern Vaishnavism ranks Vishnuchitta, Yogin and poet, of Villipattan in the land of the Pandyas. He is termed Perialwar, the great Alwar. A tradition, which we need not believe, places him in the ninety-eighth year of the Kaliyuga. But these divine singers are ancient enough, since they precede the great saint and philosopher Ramanuja whose personality and teaching were the last flower of the long-growing Vaishnava tradition. Since his time Southern Vaishnavism has been a fixed creed and a system rather than a creator of new spiritual greatnesses.

The poetess Andal was the foster-daughter of Vishnuchitta, found by him, it is said, a new-born child under the sacred tulsi-plant. We know little of Andal except what we can gather from a few legends, some of them richly beautiful and symbolic. Most of Vishnuchitta's poems have the infancy and boyhood of Krishna for their subject. Andal, brought up in that atmosphere, cast into the mould of her life what her foster-father had sung in inspired hymns. Her own poetry—we may suppose that she passed early into the Light towards which she yearned, for it is small in bulk,—is entirely occupied with her passion for the divine Being. It is said that she went through a symbolic marriage with Sri Ranganatha, Vishnu in his temple at Srirangam, and disappeared into the image of her Lord. This tradition probably conceals some actual fact, for Andal's marriage with the Lord is still celebrated annually with considerable pomp and ceremony.

(CWSA 5 : 577-78)
About Bhagavan’s Diksha

An opinion
Paola De Paolis

One of the many thought-provoking New Age phenomena mentioned recently by Ervin Laszlo in one of his talks in Auroville, is the diksha (or deeksha) experiment launched by Sri Bhagavan, the founder of the Golden City and Oneness University at Varadeyapalyam, 90 km. north of Chennai, who is called also Sri Kalki or the Avatar of Enlightenment. Two years ago an experiment took place simultaneously in 350 places all around the world which consisted of energy transfer from the guru to people gathered in thousands to achieve, on that occasion, ‘Enlightenment’ and ‘Oneness’. This guru is giving diksha regularly to masses of disciples going to the Golden City for that purpose. They often also receive the “power” to give diksha themselves at the same time.

Now, if it is true that the only possible solution to develop the solidarity the world needs is to enter a higher level of consciousness in order to understand that there is a field which connects us all to each other, we must also be clear about certain implications.

First of all, we have to admit that if we knew everything of Quantum Science and were able to demonstrate the existence of a unifying field, the level of consciousness needed to experience this field of interconnections (i.e. to realize it at a cellular level, not just to feel it intuitively or to be thrilled by it emotionally), is quite different altogether. We cannot talk anybody into having it, not only because its price is too high (not less than our ego!), but also because it actually represents a higher evolutionary step, a step belonging no more to the mind, nor to any of the mental planes which include, as we know from Sri Aurobindo’s experience, Overmind, the ceiling, so to say, of the mental sphere.

The Supramental Consciousness (and not the Overmental one) is indeed the Consciousness of Unity in Multiplicity, the “Truth-Consciousness”, as Sri Aurobindo called it, using the term of the Vedic Rishis. It is a transcendental consciousness to be realized in the body at the cellular level, and is beyond all the traditional realizations which were in “toccata and fugue”-style, contacts with the Transcendent, which afterwards took flight.

“There are a million of ways to escape, but only one to stay”, said the Mother. Maybe one way to escape can be not only to sit cross-legged, enraptured by that transcendental dimension, but also to consciously “want” some realization instead of merely tasting it, facing the daily inner work without getting impatient due to lack of immediate results (see the supramental, not overmental, message of the Gita as Sri Aurobindo explained it: Mother's Agenda (MA) Vol.3, 26 Sept. '62)

“One of the most considerable obstacles [to get in touch with the Supermind in our bodies] is that deviation of aspiration into a thirst for something … this mixture with the ego consciousness”, said the Mother (MA Vol.5, 21 Oct. ’64), remembering, among other things, what happened in the Ashram during its bright period in 1926 when she had made an overmental creation and the gods were beginning to manifest. The disciples were thrilled by marvellous experiences, and Pondicherry would have eventually become a centre of attraction for masses of people from all around the word if the Mother had not undone everything (by cutting the connection with the Overmind), after Sri Aurobindo’s laconic remark on the situation: “You are in full Overmind: that is not the Truth we want to manifest… That’s
not the truth we are seeking: it’s not the truth, the highest truth.” (MA Vol. 3, 22 Dec. ’62). The Mother undid it all, “when the obvious temptation was to hang on it and say: ‘We’ll improve on it’—which is impossible… We had to start over again with something else. I told no one about it … because they would have been completely discouraged.” (MA Vol.3, 2 Dec. ’62).

Overmind, which is the domain of the gods, has been ruling the earth until now. As the Mother says, it “just overlooks the earth and the mind (including the very highest mind). But … this TERRESTRIAL evolution has, with the human species, created a kind of higher intellectuality capable of passing through the overmental region … and reach a higher Principle directly. But this region of the gods, with the power to govern the universe and, PARTIALLY, the earth, does have its own reality: you can come into contact with it and use it: the Vedic ‘forefathers’ used it, occultists use it, even Tantrics use it…” (MA Vol.3, 26 Sept. ’62).

Of course, we can treat ourselves to the luxury of all these overmental experiences, and they, as the Mother said, “increase your knowledge and your power, your this and your that, but it’s not particularly important. THE thing is altogether different… We can have access to the Supermind without any of these experiences, they are not indispensable.” (ibid.)

Sri Aurobindo never put too much emphasis on achieving the Overmind, knowing that its alluring power easily makes people get stuck there: “it is still a magnified version of our world, and part of the old path; it has nothing to do with the Supramental Creation, which will bring to earth the sense of the Supreme and the Unique. The overmental consciousness is a magnified consciousness: far lovelier, far loftier, far more powerful, far happier, far… with lots of ‘far more’ in it. But … no sense of all being one.” (ibid.).

Of course, Overmind has also the power to simulate supramental realization, but a bit of discernment can save us from mistakes in that matter. The unity we can feel in the Overmind is a sum of a lot of different things, not “Oneness at play with itself”. Maybe for that reason Overmind likes gatherings. As long as we remain in its domain, ego is always laying an ambush. The big shift, or quantum leap, is not a leap from the mind (at its highest degree) as a spring-board. It’s only a changing of the guard, better, of the guide, from the masculine side of our being (the separative mind, connected with the ego), to the feminine side (psychic, subtly connected with the heart, our alchemic centre of transmutation, naturally silent, open, receptive). A shift, if you like, from the love of power to the Power of Love.

"Sri Aurobindo used to say: it is woman that can build a bridge between the old world and the Supramental world." "That's it, that's the work now in progress." (MA Vol.13, 26 Apr. ’72)

It’s indeed only when the mind is silent that the psychic being can start its active work, if we are ready to allow it, which is the work of the “Mother”, i.e. of the Power of the Transcendent in us, hidden in “the secret cave” of our heart, the ‘feminine’ aspect of the Non-manifest Unique Supreme, that aspect which came down into the dynamics of the Becoming and the Multiplicity.

Supramental glimpses have nothing sensational to show on the outside, but, at the end, they are really effective: they stay behind the scenes until things are fulfilled. We can get them in those moments when the deepest core of our heart can do its healing work (which will be lasting for all our precious life-times), deleting, one by one, the old unconscious patterns recorded in our cell-memory, (those patterns calling our attention by their implicit unwell feeling), if we have the courage not to escape ("there are a million ways" to do that) but to live integrally in the present moment, in the Here and Now.

Living in the Here and Now is impossible, of course, if we are in our mind, as mind can only
push us, at every moment, to re-act on the basis of its old conditionings, of its congenital fear. Only then can we experience, in our body, at a vibrational level, the perfection of that field of interconnections: The Oneness. “The sign of the Supermind is Oneness. There is no more a play BETWEEN oneself and things.” (MA Vol. 3, 26 Sept. ’62).

“What is being attempted now isn’t a miraculous event at all, but the LOGICAL and normal and inevitable CONSEQUENCE of the supramental transformation – that is the whole point” the Mother affirmed, when explaining the imperative necessity for Her not to wield powers (“because that’s not the way things should be done”), and the dreadful, subconscient revolt in the Ashram atmosphere against Her declaration. “It’s that mixture in people’s thoughts, in people’s feelings, in their approach to spiritual life, which is catastrophic – they always “want” something … it’s a perpetual bargaining. It’s not the need to give yourself, not the need to melt into the Divine…” (MA Vol. 5, 21 Oct. 64).

So, this deepest core of the heart is the new dimension of our soul to discover today, as the times are ripe for that after all the beautiful realizations of our inglorious mental past.

‘Inglorious’ simply because its realizations never uprooted our habit of dying. They couldn’t.

Overmind’s highest realizations in fact are never interested in conquering Death, in undergoing the throes of a transmutational process; they are always coming to terms with something cherished by the ego (also the ‘spiritual’ ego), therefore with separation. But Supermind, the real Oneness, can manifest only when there isn’t the slightest compromise.

Going back now to the interesting phenomenon triggered by Sri Bhagavan’s diksha and looking at the photo showing this guru (considered by many one of the great Indian saints of these times) and his wife seated on a double chair, two things (apart from any other consideration which is not pertinent here) naturally catch the eye. The first one is that they sit in reverse to the way that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo used to sit on the darshan double chair. That is, he, Sri Bhagavan, is on the right side, the side of action – which Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, leaves to the Mother. The second one is their triumphant smile – whereas Sri Aurobindo and the Mother look deeply concentrated. Can we guess why? Because they belong to the future.

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Her stage adaptation “Savitri – La Scoperta dell’Anima e la Vittoria sulla Morte” (from Sri Aurobindo’s poem) was performed at the Auditorium of Rome in November 2007.
She has been living in Auroville for more than 20 years.
All things are real that here are only dreams.

All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky.

For joy and not for sorrow earth was made.

There is a purpose in each stumble and fall.

A death-bound littleness is not all we are.

We are greater than our thoughts.

Escape brings not the victory and the crown.

Death helps us not, vain is the hope to cease.

The soul in man is greater than his fate.

Our human state cradles the future god.