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Why Sri Aurobindo Is Cool

By Craig Hamilton

“BUT SRI AUROBINDO *is* cool!” I exclaimed to Andrew Cohen, my spiritual teacher and editor-in-chief.

“Yes, *we* know that, but how are you going to communicate that to our readers?” he asked.

“Won’t it be enough for me to just tell them his incredible story? I mean, check it out: *Controversial freedom fighter attains enlightenment in jail and relinquishes leadership of the revolution to become one of the greatest philosopher/yogis and evolutionary thinkers to have ever lived.* You’ve got to admit, that’s one hell of a headline.”

Andrew smiled. “Okay. Maybe for the *Enlightenment Times*. But listen, there’s one problem. He’s a dead guru. A great dead guru, no doubt. An amazing dead guru. Probably one of the most extraordinary dead gurus the world has ever known. But face it, he’s old news. We’re *What Is Enlightenment?* We’re cutting edge. This is about *living* inquiry. We don’t do dead gurus. As Adi Da said . . .”

“. . . *dead gurus don’t kick ass!*” My colleagues finished his sentence in chorus.

I couldn’t believe we were having this conversation. “What about Babaji?” I leapt up. “Nobody can seem to prove that he was *ever* alive! And we’re doing *him!*”

“Immortal sages are one thing. But Sri Aurobindo has been decidedly buried for fifty years. I know the doctors were all amazed that his body didn’t start to decay for four days, but I’d hate to see it now,” Andrew laughed.

“Well, Swami Vivekananda’s in this issue and he’s not exactly tearing up the conference circuit these days, is he?” I was sure I had him with this one.

“It’s okay to print an excerpt from someone’s book,” he replied, “but you’re asking us to fly you all the way to India to do in-depth research on someone we can all read everything we need to know about on the web.”

“But look,” I pleaded, “we’re doing an issue on evolutionary enlightenment. How many people even know what that is? Everybody these days thinks enlightenment is the end, the grand finale, the ultimate blast-off into *nirvana* never to return again. But Sri Aurobindo GOT IT. He was the first one to get it. And he got it like few have ever gotten it since. Sure, people can read about him on the web, but first they have to find out how amazing he was. That’s why I want to do this piece, to tell them. And to really do it right, I think I have to go to India, to visit his ashram and talk to the people who knew him, to get the real inside story.”

Andrew motioned for me to sit down. “Okay, listen,” he said. “I can’t argue with what you’re saying. And I’m not going to say there’s no way you can do it. But before I agree to send you halfway around the world, you’ve got to come up with some kind of angle, some way to bring Sri Aurobindo alive that is hip, modern, intriguing, and, most of all, *relevant* to enlightenment in the twenty-first century. This can’t just be another rehash of the old story. Give it some thought and we’ll talk again tomorrow.”

As we wrapped up our daily editorial meeting, it was all I could do to contain my excitement. It had been tough going, but I had gained the foothold I'd been hoping for.

I had shown up at that afternoon's meeting with a stack of books on the pioneering twentieth-century sage Sri Aurobindo, knowing I probably had my work cut out for me. Although I had no doubt that everyone on the team had tremendous respect for his work, I knew that a feature story about a great figure from the past, particularly in an issue about the future, would be a tough sell.

"Isn't he extremely hard to read?" one of my colleagues had asked straightaway, "as if somehow he accidentally got his genes crossed with a German philosopher or something?" I couldn't deny that he was in fact a tough read, having first learned to write in Latin and Greek, two languages in which the construction of long sentences is actually a sort of high art. But nonetheless, I knew that my only chance to win my case lay in reading a few passages aloud:

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god.

That got their attention. I read a little more:

. . . for the full and perfect fulfillment of the evolutionary urge, [the spiritual] illumination and change must take up and re-create the whole being, mind, life and body: it must be not only an inner experience of the Divinity but a remoulding of both the inner and outer existence by its power; it must take form not only in the life of the individual but as a collective life of gnostic beings established as a highest power and form of the becoming of the Spirit in the earth-nature.

After reading a few more pages in the same vein, I looked around at their faces. They were captivated. I wasn't surprised. In the course of our research for this issue, we had already come upon some extraordinary evolutionary thinkers, but Sri Aurobindo's words carried a spiritual weight like no one else we had read. A weight that, in light of our issue topic, and our reasons for choosing this topic now, meant a lot. For the idea to do an issue on evolution and enlightenment had been triggered by a series of unexpected breakthroughs in the collective practice of our own spiritual community. Breakthroughs that, unless we were all crazy, seemed to suggest a great deal about the relationship between enlightenment and humanity's potential for a further collective evolution. So far, however, none of the traditional religions had been able to shed light on our experience. But on page after page, Sri Aurobindo was coming through in spades.

Although reading aloud from Sri Aurobindo had made our entire editorial team curious to learn more about his teachings, it had only brought me a hair's breadth closer to my goal. As I left the meeting that afternoon, it was clear that I still had a lot more persuading to do before I would be on my way to India. That night, while ruminating over how I could possibly convince the world that Sri Aurobindo was cool, I got a sudden flash of what I hoped was inspiration. And after spending the better part of the night trying to put it into words, I showed up at the next afternoon's meeting ready for another round.

"I want to read you what I've written," I jumped in at the start of the meeting before anyone could even mention the day's news.

"Written?" Andrew looked slightly puzzled. "About what?"

“About Sri Aurobindo,” I answered confidently. “I thought about what you said about needing to make him look cool, and I think I’ve got an angle. I’ve already written the first four pages.”

“That’s a new one,” he laughed. “Writing the piece *before* you do the research. If we could all do that, maybe we could start coming out quarterly. It would save us a lot on airfares, too. Well, what are you waiting for? Let’s hear it.”

I began:

When most of us think of Sri Aurobindo, we probably think of that famous image of him, sitting there in that throne of a chair, long white beard and hair, looking like something straight out of a Hollywood movie in which he was cast in the role of God. You can almost imagine his voice, thundering with frightening authority in perfect King James English like Robert Powell’s classic rendition of Jesus of Nazareth. But take a look behind the scenes at the life of this revolutionary mystic, and you’ll find yourself face-to-face with a very different sort of character. You see, the real Sri Aurobindo was no otherworldly ivory tower patriarch, calling out to the lost masses from on high. No, he was a man of action, a fiery wit, a power yogi, a spiritual renegade if there ever was one. In a word, this guy was cool. Really cool. As Michael Murphy, best-selling author, co-founder of Esalen Institute, and a former resident of Sri Aurobindo’s ashram, put it: “Aurobindo is a stupendously great guy. He opened up so much. Hardly anyone has this vision that puts the two together—God and the evolving universe. Hardly anyone! Most people in Eastern philosophy take the more traditional view that’s represented by Huston Smith or Ram Dass. Which is the classical mystical view that factors in evolution little if at all.”

Let me translate. What Mike is saying here is that Sri Aurobindo brought a radical (not in the California sense) new vision to spiritual life that, as far as anyone can tell, no other mystic before him had done. The fact is, with the possible exception of Judaism, almost all religious and mystical traditions, East and West—even if they promote doing good works in the world, chopping wood and carrying water, or being a bodhisattva dedicated to the liberation of all beings—ultimately see the *goal* of spiritual practice as some kind of vertical liftoff, out of this world into either a transcendent beyond, a heaven, or a final cessation in *nirvana*. Sri Aurobindo had the audacity to say that this view was a mistake. A big mistake. He even had the *chutzpah* to say it was a mistake made by the likes of Shankara and the Buddha. To him, the goal was something much more significant. He said that if we were only willing to consciously participate in EVOLUTION, we could create a “divine life” right here on earth. No vertical liftoff. No great escape, but a ceaseless, dynamic, miraculous unfolding of ever-higher expressions of harmony and unity, *here in this world*.

And there’s more. A lot more. Take poetry. Poetry is cool these days, right? Well, let me tell you, if Sri Aurobindo were alive, he’d take the “poetry slam” to a whole new level. He’d make the beats look like deadbeats. He’d have the rappers running back to grammar school. He published his first poem when he was twelve. His longest poem, *Savitri*, which took him almost thirty-five years to write, is twenty-four thousand lines long. It’s his highest example of what he called “future poetry” or “overhead poetry”—poetry written from the highest planes of consciousness. And it’s high all right. Good

luck digesting more than a few stanzas without going into *samadhi* [ecstatic absorption]. Definitely not to be read while operating heavy machinery. And did I mention that Aldous Huxley, Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck, and others independently nominated Sri Aurobindo for the Nobel Prize in Literature?

Now, being a political revolutionary is seriously cool, right? Well, how about the fact that, after reading a poem by Shelley on the French revolution at the age of eleven (that's right, eleven), Aurobindo decided that he, too, would like to devote his life "to a similar world-change" and lead his then oppressed homeland to freedom. And after finishing a star-studded academic career at Cambridge University while surviving on little more than "toast and tea," he became, by the age of thirty-four, the leading figure in the Indian independence movement. The British even labeled him the "most dangerous man" in India, and threw him in jail—solitary confinement to be precise—for the better part of a year while he was on trial for his alleged involvement in a terrorist bombing.

But guess what he did in jail. Did he get depressed? No. He meditated. Boy, did he! In fact, it was there, in a barren six-by-nine cell, that he underwent one of the most extraordinary transformations of his remarkable, if not epic, spiritual journey. After a short time, as he tells it, "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was [God] who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was [God], it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw [God]. . . . Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover." So much for solitary confinement.

And while we're on the subject of spiritual breakthroughs, let's take a look at his yoga. And, I'm not talking here about the curvaceous-blond-doing-*suptavirasana*-by-the-California-seashore-at-sunset *Yoga Journal* calendar kind of yoga. This was yoga in the traditional sense: Seeking union with the Divine through real, disciplined, inward spiritual practice. Meditation and contemplation, as most of us would call it. Now, for Sri Aurobindo, although he was never one to slouch in the face of required effort, the yoga part seemed to come easy. In fact, the very first time he went to a teacher for guidance, he found himself thrust into a state of consciousness many never reach in an entire lifetime of practice. After simply following the instructions of this little-known yogi to reject any thoughts that tried to enter his mind, he found that "In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free."

And just so we're clear, the "freedom" that he experienced—and continued to experience from that day on—was, in his words, none other than "Nirvana," the "concrete consciousness of stillness and silence" most of us think of as the ground and goal of all true mystical pursuit:

To reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition [in which] there was no ego, no real world . . . no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. . . . What it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom.

But for Sri Aurobindo, the experience did not end there. Although it was “attended at first by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world,” his experience eventually began to give way to the recognition of a deeper truth:

The aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. . . . Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realization, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. . . . And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self.

In these Buddhistically enlightened days in the West, Sri Aurobindo’s claim that *nirvana* is not the end of the path may seem a little strange. After all, doesn’t *nirvana* by its very definition mean “the end,” the final cessation toward which all of our striving is headed? I mean, sure, if we’re *really* selfless bodhisattvas, we might think about postponing our *nirvana* for a few eons. But we all know where we’re going in the end, right? Cessation, release, transcendence, the Beyond.

“I’m not sure you can really assume that about our readers,” Elizabeth, one of my colleagues, interrupted. “Granted, most spiritual people don’t tend to think of the goal in terms of evolution, but I think people probably have lots of different ideas about where their spiritual practice is taking them. Just look at how many people we’ve come across doing this issue on evolution who see the goal of the spiritual path as the attainment of physical immortality or the ‘light body.’” She turned to the rest of the team.

“She’s right,” Carter agreed. “In fact, wasn’t Sri Aurobindo one of them?”

“Well, yes,” I conceded, “I think something like that was at least a part of what he was aiming for. But it definitely wasn’t the main event. Shall I keep reading?”

“Did you just say that Sri Aurobindo thought the goal of the spiritual path had something to do with physical immortality and the light body?” Andrew asked.

“Well, I’m not completely clear on that one yet myself,” I admitted. “From what I’ve read, though, it does seem that he thought that physical immortality would be one of the *results* of the transformation he was pointing to. I mean, to be honest, he talks a lot about the transformation of the physical body, and I actually don’t feel like I understand that part very well yet. But I think the gist of it is that in the course of our further spiritual evolution, as greater divine powers begin to work in us, *all* limitations, even physical limitations, would eventually be transcended.”

“Sounds pretty far out,” Carter remarked. “But you said that definitely wasn’t the main event. So what, in your mind, was the main event? What’s gotten you so fired up about this?”

“Well, I think it’s really what I wrote at the beginning about his ultimate vision of the purpose and goal of the spiritual quest. His idea that we can create a divine life on earth. Actually, this is exactly what I wrote about in the next part of my piece. Here, I’ll keep going. I’m skipping ahead a little.”

If one is aiming for a spiritual goal beyond or outside of this world, it’s easy to keep the nature of that goal pretty nebulous. Words like *nirvana*, or enlightenment, or God-

realization, when referring to a lofty or transcendent attainment, can mean, well, just about anything. But when, as in Sri Aurobindo's case, the goal of the spiritual path becomes about something that must happen in *this* world, the options start to narrow, and the target quickly starts to define itself. And for Sri Aurobindo that target was dead clear. It was nothing less than the total transformation of the human being on every level. Through the dedicated practice of what he called "Integral Yoga," or yoga that addresses every aspect of life, he felt that human beings could purify themselves of all negative, egoic tendencies and in so doing become ultimately perfect and stainless vehicles for the expression of the "divine consciousness" in this world. This, to him, was the evolutionary leap toward which all of humanity's highest aspirations are pointing.

For Sri Aurobindo, however, to consider this extraordinary transformation as simply a further stage in human evolution was by no means enough to do justice to the level of change he was envisioning. To him, such a radical transformation of consciousness, and of life, could only accurately be described as the birth of an entirely new type of being—a life-form that he referred to variously as "the Gnostic being" or "supramental being" or sometimes simply "the superman."

Now, if the idea of a new type of being coming into existence has you wondering how you ended up in the sci-fi section, I can only assure you that, at least as far as I can tell, Sri Aurobindo is not suggesting that we will learn to fly, develop an intense aversion to kryptonite, or acquire x-ray vision anytime soon. What he is suggesting, however, is that if the next grand step in evolution is indeed the manifestation of a divine life on earth, and if the radical transformation of human nature itself is indeed the means toward that end, then the goal that Nature is currently reaching toward does seem to be none other than the emergence of what will in some fundamental sense be a completely new type of being. A being in whom, as he puts it:

There could be . . . no place for . . . the satisfaction or frustration of the limited self . . . no place for the relative and dependent happiness and grief that visit and afflict our limited nature; for these are things that belong to the ego and the Ignorance, not to the freedom and truth of the Spirit.

Having wholly transcended the narrow, self-centered motivations of the ego and having been illumined by the light and truth of the highest levels of consciousness, this "Gnostic being" would truly be a pure vessel through which the Divine, in all its glory, could manifest itself freely in this world:

One in self with all, the supramental being will seek the delight of self-manifestation of the Spirit in himself but equally the delight of the Divine in all: he will have the cosmic joy and will be a power for bringing the bliss of the Spirit, the joy of being to others; for their joy will be part of his own joy of existence.

"Isn't that beautiful?" I erupted. "This is what I'm so excited about. This is it! This is the whole point: That we have the potential to become truly God-inspired, God-motivated beings living a life completely beyond the ego. I mean we all see the potential for this, right? We see it in each other when we're at our best. And we know this is why we're here to make this happen. Why else would we be here? Anyway, I know I'm preaching to the choir, but it just hit me again as I was reading that last quote how completely extraordinary what he's pointing to really is.

“In terms of the piece, this is as far as I’ve written, but the next point I want to make is about the collective aspect of his vision. Because that’s really where it’s all leading, in the end. It’s what he devotes most of the last chapter of *The Life Divine* to speaking about. He basically says that for the divine life to truly manifest, it’s not enough for a few highly evolved individuals to just kind of be around transmitting love and light to everybody else. He’s saying that what has to happen is for a group of ‘gnostic beings’ to come together and begin to manifest a completely different kind of collective life. He writes about this in incredible detail, too. He describes how, when a group of egoless beings come together in the knowledge of their absolute unity with one another and with the whole, then completely different rules apply; all the structures and institutions and modes of relating and responding, individually and collectively, become informed by what he called the ‘Truth-Consciousness’ or ‘supramental consciousness’ and the result is really nothing less than a completely ‘new world.’ See, this is what I mean. No one else has written about all this. I mean, does anybody even *know* about this? Do you see why I want to do this piece?”

Andrew threw up his hands. “Okay, okay, you’ve convinced me. You’re right, we need to do something on Sri Aurobindo for this issue. So when do you leave for India?”

“Wait, before we finish,” Carter jumped in, “I just want to make sure I have the story straight. Because you said he had all these big experiences while he was busy leading the revolution. But he didn’t just keep leading the revolution in the midst of this unfolding revelation, did he? You’d think the spiritual life would have eventually pulled him away from all that.”

“Well, believe it or not, he did keep leading it for quite a while, even after those experiences. Even while he was in the midst of that big, ongoing experience of *nirvana* I mentioned, he visited a bomb factory and he gave something like fifteen political speeches. People said they were the best speeches he ever gave. He did eventually pull out of the revolution, though. In 1910, he heard the British were going to arrest him again, so he fled Calcutta, eventually ending up in Pondicherry, a French colony that was offering asylum to the freedom fighters. It seems like what happened there was that he got so fired up about this revolutionary spiritual vision he was discovering that he just lost interest in fighting the political revolution. He stayed there in Pondicherry, until the end of his life, doing his own spiritual practice, guiding other people in theirs, and putting his teachings of Integral Yoga into writing.”

“It’s quite a story,” Amy said. “The more you hear, the harder it is to believe this was all one guy.”

“Yeah, and I have a feeling there’s a lot more where that came from,” I replied. “That’s why it’ll be great to go and visit the ashram. Did you know they actually refer to it as a ‘laboratory of evolution’? There are sixteen hundred people living there, some of whom have been around since the early days. I’m sure they’re going to have a lot to say about Sri Aurobindo and Integral Yoga and, with any luck, about evolution as well.”

The Mother

For most of us, the mention of an Indian ashram does not exactly bring to mind a dynamic picture. We probably think of bearded, orange-robed swamis sitting before statues of Hindu gods and goddesses chanting mantras; early-morning gatherings for

meditation and *bhajan* singing; a quiet, simple, contemplative sort of life. But step through the gates of Sri Aurobindo Ashram and you're in for a very different kind of ride. In fact, arriving in the ashram on a sunny November morning, I found no inward-turning swamis, but energetic men, women, boys, and girls, young and old, dressed not in ochre robes but in polo shirts and khaki shorts! Now, if you've never traveled in India, the fact that everyone was wearing shorts at an ashram might not mean much. But to anyone who has dragged a backpack around this socially conservative country, it is all but incomprehensible. Any travel guide worth the price of the paper it's printed on will tell you flat out: Unless you're hell-bent on offending the locals, *don't wear shorts*. What gives with the shorts? I wondered.

A visit with ashram reception, my first stop of the day, soon got me my answer. "The idea of wearing shorts came from the Mother," the man behind the desk informed me. "She instituted this back in the early forties. It was a very controversial step at the time, but now it is quite acceptable throughout the town. The Mother was a real pioneer, you know. She has left her mark in every field of life. Do you know much about her?"

"I've read some of her books," I replied. But given that her pictures seemed to take up more ashram wall space than even Sri Aurobindo's, I realized I was probably going to be learning a whole lot more about her over the next couple of days.

Not to be confused with *his* mother, *the* Mother, I would learn, was a French painter and musician named Mirra Richard, who showed up on Sri Aurobindo's doorstep in 1914 only to recognize that he was the spiritual teacher who had been appearing to her in visions since her early teens. Mirra was a highly accomplished occultist who had, by her own account, been "doing yoga" since she was four and soaring out of her body by night for most of her life. She had studied with some big occult leaders in Algeria and had led esoteric study groups in Paris with attendees as prestigious as the illustrious Tibetologist Alexandra David-Neel. A painter and member of Paris's artistic elite, mixing with the likes of Rodin and Matisse during her early years, she was an extraordinarily cultured woman.

Now when most of us hear the word "occult," we probably think of séances, spells, Ouija boards, and other mysterious, slightly spooky things happening in candle-lit rooms. And while the Mother no doubt participated in her fair share of those, her real occult calling was of a considerably different order. Her various "missions on earth" included such formidable tasks as vanquishing or "converting" the four great *asuras*, or demonic forces, that hold the world in their grip (one of whom she conveniently managed to marry). Moreover, she had known from an early age that she also had a task in front of her that could only be called "spiritual" in nature. As she tells it, "Between [the ages of] eleven and thirteen a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man's possibility of uniting with Him, of realizing Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine." No surprise, then, that when she finally met Sri Aurobindo in the flesh, the impact struck deep. As she wrote the next day in her diary, "It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth."

Mirra's first visit to the ashram, however, ended abruptly after a year, when World War I broke out and she departed with her husband, who was called back to France to

serve. But when she returned to India for good in 1920, Sri Aurobindo apparently soon recognized her extraordinary spiritual capacities and before long began to relate to her as a sort of confidante and collaborator in his work. Impressed by her remarkable proclivity for the practical, within a few years he gave her free rein to plan, build, and run his growing ashram, ultimately even putting her in charge of providing personal spiritual guidance to the disciples. And run it she did. As Michael Murphy, who knew her personally, would tell me later: “She kicked ass. She really kicked ass. She was a strong personality. She was shrewd. She was a real builder, a businessperson, extremely able. *And* she was spiritually realized. She ran a tight ship.” In fact, I would learn, during the fifty-three years she lived at the ashram, it was the Mother’s influence, much more even than Sri Aurobindo’s, that was the guiding force in the growth and development of this burgeoning spiritual community, and of the work of Integral Yoga as a whole.

In the course of my first day at the ashram, thanks to the help of a couple of veteran ashramites who volunteered to show me around, I had the chance to speak with a broad range of people about the powerful role this unlikely guru from Paris played, and continues to play, in their lives. Later that evening, my head spinning from everything I had heard, I joined the community meditation. I had barely begun to sink in when my cell phone rang. “Damn. I can’t believe I forgot to turn it off!” I cursed myself while running tiptoe through the mass of silent meditators, trying to get to the gate before the next ring.

“Guess who?” It was Andrew and my colleagues in chorus on the speakerphone. “What’s happening in the laboratory?”

“Well,” I answered, not sure where to begin, “it’s a lot to take in. The people are all really nice, and they have been extremely helpful. And, from what I can tell, pretty much all of them seem deeply devoted.”

“To evolution?” Carter asked.

“Well, I think so, at least some of them,” I answered. “But what’s ten times more apparent is their devotion to the Mother.”

“The Mother?” They sounded dumbfounded.

“Yeah. I had no idea what a huge role she played here either. I mean, from the looks of things, they’re much more devoted to her than they are even to Sri Aurobindo.”

“Could that just be because she was there for twenty years after he died, so people had more contact with her?” Amy suggested.

“I think that was probably part of it, but there’s more to it. You see, Sri Aurobindo apparently told everyone that devotion and surrender to her, as the Divine Mother on earth, was the most crucial part of the path.”

“It sounds like she was really seen as a powerful spiritual master in her own right,” Elizabeth commented.

“There’s no question about it. In fact, Sri Aurobindo even said that he and the Mother were ‘one consciousness.’ And everyone here is convinced that both of them are avatars who descended from heaven to bring down the ‘supramental consciousness,’ or actually that the two of them put together make up a single avatar, or something like that. It’s a little confusing. But the one thing I can say is that the way people speak about what it was like to be with her, it’s obvious that she touched them really deeply. I don’t know where else I’ve seen such intense devotion.”

“I wonder why we didn’t know more about the Mother’s influence,” Elizabeth said. “Could there have been some major hole in your research?”

“Well, maybe,” I responded, “but Georges Van Vrekhem, who has written biographies of both of them, told me today that hardly anyone in America takes any notice of the Mother. I’m not sure why.”

“Well, it sounds like an adventure in the making,” Andrew concluded. “It’ll be great to hear where things are at in a day or two.”

Integral Yoga

Having spent nearly my whole first day getting a crash course on the Mother, by my second afternoon I was ready to get back to Sri Aurobindo. Reading about his extraordinary life had been one thing. But now, finally, I was going to get a chance to meet someone who had actually known him. Well, sort of. My appointment that afternoon was with a man Sri Aurobindo had named Amal Kiran, or “the Clear Ray,” a widely loved and highly respected poet, author, and cultural critic more commonly known as K. D. Sethna, who had moved to the ashram in 1927. Having arrived on the scene when there were still only a handful of disciples, one would naturally assume that Amal would have had a close personal relationship with the Master. So when he told me that he had never actually heard Sri Aurobindo’s voice, I was slightly taken aback. Until I remembered reading that Sri Aurobindo withdrew into seclusion in 1926, and after that, no one except the Mother, the occasional visiting V.I.P., and a handful of physicians who helped him recover after an injury *had* heard his voice. In those days, if you wanted to have a relationship with Sri Aurobindo beyond the thrice-yearly *darshans* [audiences with the Master], there was only one way to do it. You wrote letters to him. And, at least most of the time, he wrote back. Amal, I would learn, had been one of the ones who wrote the most. In fact, being a poet of high repute himself, he had the good fortune to enter into an ongoing correspondence with Sri Aurobindo about the creation of the Master’s epic poem, *Savitri*. And Amal, with Sri Aurobindo’s help, had also cultivated the art of writing “overhead poetry,” although, as he would confess, he hadn’t quite been able to write from the *very* highest planes of consciousness.

Now ninety-seven, Amal was, without a doubt, the most radiant presence I would meet during my time there. Realizing at the outset that I was talking with someone who had been doing Integral Yoga for seventy-five years, I didn’t waste time on history or philosophy. What is the essence of the practice? I wanted to know. Amal didn’t hesitate for a second.

“This path has to be approached in a spirit of complete spiritual self-surrender,” he explained. “It is not an individual achievement, but a lending of oneself to what the Supreme Divine wants. And in the daily functions, remember the Divine, and offer yourself to the Divine. And along that path of self-giving, it is the Divine who will decide how far you will go. One must approach the Divine with a spirit that says: ‘Whatever You want, do. Make me what You want me to be, and not what I might dream of being.’ The yoga has to be in that spirit.”

Over the course of my conversation with Amal that afternoon, which ranged widely across the territory of Integral Yoga, for the first time I began to get a sense of how much it really takes to practice this comprehensive path that Sri Aurobindo had deemed “more difficult than any other.”

My talk with Amal had run right through the ashram dinner hour, and desperate for some Western food, I took my chances at one of the Italian restaurants along the oceanfront. Halfway through one of the wateriest plates of fettuccine I've ever encountered, my phone rang again. Sure enough, it was the home team.

"I'm meeting some incredible people," I started off. "Remember K. D. Sethna, or Amal Kiran the famous Indian writer I told you about who was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and who had that long-standing correspondence with Father Bede Griffiths, the revered Christian *sannyasin*? We spent an hour together this afternoon, and he was beautiful. Ninety-seven years old, more or less immobilized in a wheelchair at the ashram nursing home, but totally present, awake, sharp as a razor, and radiating something extraordinary. I mean, the presence in the room by the end of our talk was profound."

"What did you talk about?" Elizabeth asked.

"Integral Yoga. I think I'm getting a better handle on it. You know how we've never been able to quite get what Integral Yoga was?"

"Yeah," they responded.

"Well, I think it's because we were trying to find some sort of list of practices. But there isn't one."

"Yoga without practice? It must be easy to get people to sign up for that!" Andrew joked.

"No, it's not that they don't *do* practices. I think pretty much everybody does some sort of practice, be it meditation or mantra or contemplation or what have you. But the point is that it's not about the practices per se. It's about a whole orientation toward life. Sri Aurobindo's goal was to bring about the total transformation of the human being on every level, and likewise the transformation of life as a whole, so he created what he called 'a world-changing or Nature-changing yoga,' an approach to the spiritual path that could be applied to every aspect of life."

"What does that mean practically?" Amy wanted to know.

"Well, as I understand it, Integral Yoga is basically a set of principles to guide one all the time, in every circumstance. I mean, he's written about it in various ways, and there are many dimensions to it, but in its essence, it's actually simple. It comes down to three things, which he called *aspiration, rejection, and surrender*. So first, you have to aspire one-pointedly to realize the Divine with your whole being. And although this aspiration can start as simply a mental act of will and intention, it ultimately has to come from a much deeper place, from your own soul's longing for that divine perfection. Then, when he speaks of rejection, he's saying that you have to reject anything that arises within you or outside of you that would obstruct the fulfillment of your aspiration. Granted, at first the subtlety of what to reject and what not to reject might not be so obvious. But if your aspiration is genuine, you will fairly quickly come to a place where it's easy to see directly what is a help and what is a hindrance. And then your aspiration is tested because you have to be willing to make the right choice."

"So where does surrender fit into the equation?" Carter asked.

"Well, according to him, surrender is the most important of the three. Because the whole point of Integral Yoga, in the end, is to become a pure vehicle so that a Higher Force can take over and begin to live in you and through you. He's very precise on this point. He says it's not enough to want to open yourself up to the Divine Power, to want to experience its glory. You have to want to become its willing servant. Because, as he sees

it, the Divine Consciousness has its own will, its own law, in a sense, in accord with the highest Truth, and in the end the only way we can create a truly divine life is to live by that perfectly, to be wholly given over to that and not in any passive way, but actively surrendered to it, giving our whole life to it.”

“You’re right, it is powerful,” Amy said. “Simple, but profound.”

“Yeah. And where this gets really interesting,” I continued, “is where he starts talking about transformation. To Sri Aurobindo, there were three distinct transformations that had to happen: the psychic, the spiritual, and the supramental. I don’t get the supramental transformation yet, so I’m not even going to try to explain it. And the spiritual transformation is, I think, what most of us probably have in mind when we speak about enlightenment or Self-realization. It’s the realization of the Infinite, the Absolute Self, or Ground of Being. But there’s something unique about what he calls the psychic transformation, particularly in relationship to evolution. For Sri Aurobindo, this was the key to the whole path.

“Apparently, when he first started teaching, and for several years after that, he used to teach people in the way he had been taught, by trying to get them to have the experience of the silent mind, presumably hoping that this would lead to the same kind of breakthrough into *nirvana* and beyond that happened to him. But in the mid-1920s, based on his findings after working with people for several years, he shifted his emphasis radically. In that shift, he started to emphasize, as the first and foremost priority, the discovery of what he called the ‘psychic being’ or ‘soul.’ Now the word ‘soul,’ particularly these days, is used to refer to all kinds of different things. But Sri Aurobindo meant something very specific. He was basically saying that there is an individual spark or seed of the Divine in each of us, what could be called our true self or, as he sometimes said, ‘true being.’ And although this true being is usually obscured or veiled by the outer personality and ego identity, its promptings can be felt even in that veiled state as our own spiritual impulses or aspirations. What’s significant about this psychic being is that, according to him, because its nature is the Divine itself, not only does it want us to evolve toward perfection, but it knows the way to get there perfectly. This is why he put so much emphasis on it. Because once the soul, or psychic being, comes forward or emerges in the individual, there is a natural dynamic aspiration that overrides all of the resistances of the ego and lower nature. It’s like the ego gets kicked out of the driver’s seat and God takes over the wheel, *as you*. And once that happens, the path changes completely. Then one is aspiring and evolving ever upward. It’s clear which choices will take one in that direction, and all the passion and interest is there to make the right choices. So from there, he felt the rest of the path could unfold organically and without much difficulty. In my interview with Amal, he couldn’t stop talking about this. I could tell that for him this had been what had changed everything. He said it’s like a shift into a completely different dimension. And when I asked him what his ongoing experience is now, he just said there is ‘a warmth and a glow in the heart center,’ and you could feel it coming out of him.”

After a brief silence, Carter spoke up. “It’s a serious teaching and Amal sounds like quite a guy. It seems like Sri Aurobindo had a big effect on people.”

“It sure does,” Andrew agreed. “Well, from the sound of things, you’re already in deep. Why don’t you see if you can get a sense of the ‘supramental,’ and let’s talk again tomorrow night.”

The Supermind

My mission for the next day was clear. Although I had managed to get a handle on much of Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary vision, and at least the rudiments of Integral Yoga, somehow what the supramental was all about had continued to elude me. In the many conversations I had had so far, I had heard numerous references to a "new consciousness" that those who live in the ashram feel to be an animating presence in their collective spiritual life. And while I had some sense that this was somehow related to what Sri Aurobindo had referred to as "the supramental consciousness," I couldn't quite be sure. And then there was this enigmatic event called the "supramental descent" or, at times, the "supramental manifestation" that seemed to occupy such a central place in the community's history. I had to find out what it was and, more importantly, why it mattered.

Throughout the day, in conversations first with my hosts, Richard Pearson and Kailash Jhaveri, and then later with a rising star on the Indian lecture circuit, Sraddhalu Ranade, I would have the chance to explore all of my questions. And by the end of the day, I had a much clearer sense of why, in the Integral Yoga community, the supramental is spoken of with such reverence. To Sri Aurobindo and to the Mother, I would learn, it was this extremely high and powerful level of consciousness that held the key to humanity's collective evolutionary potential. By the time my evening phone call came, I was eager to tell my colleagues what I had learned. But Carter had other plans.

Before I could get a word in edgewise, he launched straight in, "Hey, I think *The X-Files* just found some serious competition. Have you read Georges Van Vrekhem's book *Beyond the Human Species*?"

"Part of it." I wondered where this was leading.

"Did you happen to read this part about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother fighting World War II with their psychic powers?" he continued. "Van Vrekhem says, without the slightest equivocation, that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had a huge influence on the outcome of the war by putting their spiritual force on the side of the Allies."

"I must have missed that part. Actually, I spent more time reading Peter Heehs's biography. He never mentions anything like that."

Carter was enjoying this. "For example, it says here that Sri Aurobindo used to psychically influence Churchill's thinking. He was actually the one behind those inspiring speeches. And he influenced the military strategy, too."

"You've got to be kidding," Andrew said with a touch of exasperation. "Did Sri Aurobindo really *say* that?"

"Well, not exactly. It sounds like Van Vrekhem is inferring quite a bit," Carter reassured us. "But you haven't heard the half of it. According to him, Hitler's every move was being guided by a demon that used to appear to him in his room. Well, one night the Mother temporarily subdued this demon on the occult planes and then appeared to Hitler disguised as the demon and instructed him to attack Russia, a critical mistake that, as we all know, weakened the Western front and ultimately cost him the war."

"Hey, I once read something in a book about how that decision was made," Amy added. "I can't remember the details, but it sounded like something really spooky happened that night like Hitler was really out of his mind."

"That's an understatement," Andrew remarked.

“Well, what I want to know,” Elizabeth broke in, “is how this all fits in with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s extraordinary evolutionary vision, or for that matter, with Integral Yoga. Controlling people’s thoughts and vanquishing demons? I mean, maybe it’s just me, but I’m finding it a little hard to put this all together.”

“I actually think it’s pretty simple,” Carter announced. “Look, the Mother was interested in the occult from day one, so it’s no big shock that she was still into these things at the ashram. I mean a lot of spiritual people are fascinated by the paranormal. Look how many of your spiritual friends went to see *The Sixth Sense* or *Phenomenon*. And as for Sri Aurobindo, well, he was Indian. He was into yoga. Isn’t that just part of the whole yoga tradition? The idea that we can develop these supernormal powers or *siddhis*? I don’t know if they’re true or not, but these kinds of stories are rampant around Indian gurus. I mean, have you ever read *Autobiography of a Yogi*?”

“I agree,” I jumped in. “Anyway, if you did have powers, I can’t imagine what better cause they could be used for than saving the world from Hitler.”

“Oh, and one more thing,” Carter went on. “It also says in here that the war was actually started by evil forces attempting to block the ‘supramental manifestation’ that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were trying to bring about through their yoga.”

“That’s it,” said Andrew. “No more *X-Files* for you guys.”

“Wait a minute. Let me get this straight.” Elizabeth paused. “Do you mean to tell me that the rise of Hitler was a sort of satanic response to what they were doing down there in a little ashram in southern India?”

“I’m only telling you what the book says,” Carter replied.

“All I can say is I guess it’s a good thing they stopped the war then, since apparently they were the ones responsible for it in the first place,” Andrew concluded, laughing.

Amy tried to get us back on track. “Didn’t you say something about a supramental manifestation?”

“Yeah, Craig, did you ever manage to find out what the supramental was all about?” Carter asked. “Van Vrekhem talks about the supramental manifestation quite a bit in his book, and to be honest I can see why you were a little lost on that one.”

“I thought you’d never ask,” I replied. “I’ve been speaking to people about it all day, and I think I’m finally starting to get it. It’s powerful stuff.”

“Great. Enlighten us.” Andrew sounded relieved to be changing topics.

“Okay. Well it might seem a little complex because I feel like I’m only starting to get a handle on it, but basically the first thing you have to understand is that for Sri Aurobindo, and for the Mother, this Supermind was really *everything*. I mean, the supramental manifestation was *the* main event of everything they were trying to make happen. It was this, they felt, that would really open the door for the divine life on earth to come into being.”

“*This* being what exactly?” Carter asked. “What was it that they were trying to do?”

“Okay, well, first you have to understand the Supermind itself. Then we’ll get to the ‘manifestation.’ Remember Sri Aurobindo’s experience back in the jail cell? Well, apparently what I read to you was just the beginning of a whole series of experiences that occurred over the course of the year he spent there. During that time, he began to explore what he called the higher realms or planes of consciousness that exist above the mind. He said that there was a series of what he called ‘overhead planes,’ progressing from Higher Mind to Illumined Mind to Intuitive Mind to Overmind. And at the top of all these planes

or levels of consciousness was a level he called 'the Supermind' or 'the supramental consciousness.' Now, the thing is, and I think this is the intriguing part, this Supermind was not the same thing as the infinite, empty, static, Absolute undifferentiated pure consciousness that most mysticism points to as the highest level. It was one step down from that. Or rather, it was a sort of link plane, or bridge, between that Absolute consciousness and the whole realm of manifestation and diversification below it."

"Did you say a 'link plane'?" asked Elizabeth. "I mean, conceptually I can *kind of* get it, but do you have any idea what that really means?"

"Well, I don't know if I get exactly what 'link plane' means either, and I don't know whether Sri Aurobindo actually ever used that term himself," I continued. "What was important about this idea of a link or bridge, though, was that in some very significant sense, this level of consciousness brought together what was above it and what was below it. In other words, the Supermind is that which, while being fully conscious of the undivided, unmanifest Ground of Being, also perceives the fullness and richness and multiplicity of the manifest reality without there being any contradiction between the two. It sees the Ultimate Unity of all *in* diversity itself. It has a vision of perfect wholeness, and in that, it unifies everything.

"The reason this is so interesting, particularly in terms of evolution, is that in addition to speaking about the Supermind as that which sees the unity within diversity, Sri Aurobindo also spoke about it as a Conscious Power. So, you see, this was not a sort of passive divine state of being. It was an immense, conscious, unifying power, which contained an unimaginable transformative potential. And that, I think, was the big key because he really felt that this power, if it could be 'brought down' into the physical world, could transform life as we know it. That's what the 'supramental manifestation' was all about. He and the Mother worked to bring that down."

"And 'bring it down' means?" Carter asked.

"Well, that's the question nobody seems to be able to answer. What I do know is that in 1926, after he had a big yogic breakthrough that he called 'the descent of the Overmind' which apparently is one plane below the Supermind, he withdrew into seclusion for the rest of his life, so that he could dedicate himself completely to bringing this highest power down into 'the earth consciousness.' The important thing to understand here is that he wasn't just trying to do it for himself. He said that if he had just been trying to bring it down into himself, it would have been easy. No, whatever he was doing in that room of his for all those years was something he felt would have transformative implications for the entire race, the entire world. It's hard to know for sure exactly how he thought it would happen, but one way or another, it was going to change the consciousness, and even the very substance, of everyone on the planet."

"Was this what the focus on the body was all about?" Andrew asked. "And the idea of immortality?"

"That definitely seems to have been part of it. I mean he really thought this supramental consciousness would change *everything*, right down to the cellular level, even down to the very structure of matter itself. We're talking no limitation on every level imaginable."

"Wow," Carter said. "Talk about transformation. No wonder he was calling this the emergence of the superman."

“So, what happened in the end?” Elizabeth persisted. “Did he do it? Did Sri Aurobindo bring down the supramental?”

“Nope.”

“No?” Amy sounded disappointed. “How anticlimactic can you get? Thanks for the big buildup, Craig.”

“Wait, I wasn’t finished. *He* didn’t do it. But according to everyone here, the Mother did.”

“The Mother?!” they said as one voice.

“Yes. But with his help. According to her, he could have kept living, but he died on purpose so that he could go and work from the other side, leaving her behind to work from here, and the two of them together, six years later, made the big event happen.”

“So, what happened?” Carter asked.

“Sorry, I don’t actually know. I wish I had pursued it a little more, but I think I was so excited to finally be comprehending this thing that I missed a few obvious points. But I still have one more interview. It’s with Peter Heehs, the historian who wrote that great biography of Sri Aurobindo. I’m sure he’ll be able to give me the whole story.”

Manifesting the Supermind

The next morning, in preparation for my interview with Heehs, I ventured down to the ashram library to see what I could find out about this portentous event in which, I was told, the Mother had “manifested the Supermind in ‘the earth’s atmosphere.’” There, amidst the archives, I learned that after Sri Aurobindo’s death in 1950, the Mother had begun an intensive immersion in her own yogic efforts, an immersion so deep that at one point she even warned people not to touch her because the force coming through her was so powerful (a claim that was reportedly proven when one disciple accidentally touched her finger, only to be knocked unconscious by the strength of the force). It was in the midst of this intensive yogic effort that on February 29, 1956, the unprecedented and long-awaited “Golden Day” finally arrived. As the story goes, it was a typical Wednesday evening, and all of the disciples had gathered at the ashram playground for the Mother’s weekly talk and meditation. But as she later wrote in a message to her disciples, what happened that fateful night was much more than a meditation:

This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that ‘the time has come,’ and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.

As it’s reported, the Mother’s experience that night was overwhelming. So much so that, as Peter Heehs would tell me, at the end of the meditation “she looked up, and she thought everyone would be knocked flat on the sand of the playground.” But to her amazement, Heehs explained, “They were all just sitting there like nothing had happened. And as far as they were concerned, nothing had.” But in spite of the lack of an immediate

impact, the Mother remained rooted in her conviction that the great breakthrough had in fact occurred. Two months later, in the ashram journal, the following message appeared:

Lord, Thou hast willed and I execute:

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.

The “things that were promised” in this case meant nothing less than the introduction of a new evolutionary dynamic into “the earth consciousness” one that, as Sri Aurobindo put it, “could not fail to exercise an immense influence on mankind as a whole,” and which, given enough time, would ultimately bring about a wholesale transformation of life on earth.

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother expected this evolutionary breakthrough to unleash sweeping global changes. I wanted to know from Heehs, from his perspective as a historian, how did he think it was going? Had history borne out the predictions? As he summed it up: “I hate to say it, but it’s forty-five years later and, at least visibly, things haven’t changed much for the better. Of course, we’re talking about a cosmic development so you don’t necessarily expect everybody to be golden the next day, but . . .”

As I made the rounds of the ashram that afternoon, saying my farewells and thank-yous to the many extraordinary people I had met during my week there, I asked everyone I encountered: What did they think about the supramental manifestation? Had it really happened? And if so, what had been the effects? And over those last few hours in Pondicherry, a very different picture began to emerge. A picture that, with a little imagination, even started to look something like the faint beginnings of the new world Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had envisioned so long ago. It was clear that almost everyone thought the supramental manifestation had definitely happened. In fact, in their eyes, its unifying effects could be seen *everywhere*. From the trend toward globalization to the increasing interest in mysticism in the West, from the growing concern for the environment to the fall of the Berlin Wall, from the international coalition against terrorism to the emergence of the Internet, from the end of apartheid to the increase in women’s rights, from the New Age to the new physics, everywhere we look, they feel, there are unprecedented movements toward unity that would not have been possible before. And all of it, in the minds of the most dedicated believers, can ultimately be traced back to what happened on this one otherwise quiet night in the ashram playground.

The Call to Evolve

“So, what’s the final report from the laboratory?” Andrew asked, at the beginning of our first editorial meeting following my arrival back in the States.

“Well, it’s a lot to take in,” I answered. “In only four days, I feel like I hardly scratched the surface. But even after just a brief visit, I definitely feel like I’ve got a flavor of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were about. There’s a dynamism in the people there, a kind of awakened interest in life, in others, that’s unusual around a spiritual group, particularly in India. I mean, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were both so dynamic themselves, and you really feel that same kind of evolutionary current in the air there. It’s a powerful place.

“But, you know, in terms of my original point about Sri Aurobindo I have to tell you, after everything I’ve learned, I am more convinced than ever that both he and the Mother really were *incredibly* cool.”

Carter laughed. “Oh come on, enough of that already.”

“I’m serious. Check this out: At a certain point, Sri Aurobindo wrote something about the importance of cultivating a strong and healthy body as part of preparing for a truly integral transformation. Well, guess what the Mother did in response. She built a gym for weight lifting, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, tennis courts, a running track and soccer field with stadium, a basketball court, and an aerobics studio.”

“An aerobics studio?” Elizabeth raised an eyebrow.

“Just testing you,” I laughed. “But the rest is all true. She had the whole ashram school on a compulsory, seven-days-a-week athletic regimen that included martial arts and boxing even for the girls.”

“Boxing in an ashram? Nice try.” Elizabeth wasn’t going to fall for that again.

“I’m serious about that part. And all this was back in the fifties. In India! And do you know what else I learned? Apparently, way back at the start of World War II Sri Aurobindo actually donated money to the British to help them fight the war. Now, remember, he had been their number one enemy over there not so many years before, and at that point, India’s independence was still unresolved. I mean, talk about having a global vision he was seriously walking his talk. As to the whole question of whether he also helped *fight* the war with his spiritual power, well, I mean, I did hear this one amazing story. There was an American field sergeant in the trenches in World War II whose platoon was about to get surrounded by the Nazis, when suddenly this sort of ethereal figure appeared to him in the air and gave him explicit instructions as to how to get his troops to safety, which worked. And then, after the war, the sergeant was in India and happened to visit Pondicherry, and realized it had been Sri Aurobindo who had appeared to him! I mean I don’t know whether I believe it or not, but . . . what’s that Shakespeare quote: ‘There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in . . .’”

“Well, there is no doubt that he is, as you said, completely outrageously cool,” Andrew agreed. “He’s done so many remarkable things that I keep having to remind myself that we’re talking about a real person. But you know, more than anything, what I find so extraordinary about him was his willingness to stand alone in this evolutionary vision at a time when he was really the only one who saw it this way. It’s as if once this fire for manifesting the divine life caught hold of him, that was it, and he never backed down. The world needs more people who are willing to fight that kind of fight for the highest possible reasons. And look how much he opened up for all of us as a result.”

Carter nodded. “It is extraordinary. I’m amazed at how much he illuminated, and how much it still resonates half a century later. By the way, Craig, wasn’t that one of your missions for this trip, to show our readers why Sri Aurobindo is not only cool, but relevant to enlightenment in the twenty-first century?”

“It definitely was. And, to be honest, at this point, I’m so fired up about his teachings that I think I could write a book about it.”

“How about giving us the short version?” Carter smiled.

“Well, what I think Sri Aurobindo has to say to humanity today, which I think will be relevant until the day the entire world has indeed become divine down to the quarks, is

that evolution needs our participation. In a way, this is the most inspiring and empowering part of his vision: That through the choices we make every day, we can help to move evolution forward toward this glorious, divine end he spoke of. It's as if he was saying, in some sense, that the direction is already set, but the power to bring it about lies entirely in our hands. And that's the good news. We *can* bring it about. In fact, given the state the world is in, we *have to*. There's so much that's possible. So for any of us who still think enlightenment is about waiting for the big blast that will get us out of here, he's saying, 'Wake up and join the revolution. The revolution of consciousness. The revolution of evolution.' Because there's something to bring into being here that the world hasn't seen yet. And that, to me, is where Sri Aurobindo is going to be relevant for a long time to come."

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- p. -158 “This evening . . .” WM, p. 15, 102, quoted in BM, p. 316.
- p. -159 “Lord, Thou hast . . .” The Mother, *Bulletin of Physical Education*, April 24, 1956, quoted in BM, p. 318.
- p. -159 “could not fail . . .” Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, 1973, p. 72.
- p. -160 “There are more . . .” Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V, Staunton, Howard, ed., *The Plays of Shakespeare*, G. Routledge, London, New York, 1858-61, p. 345.

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