

# The Psychic Being: Our Opening to the Divine

By Marshall Govindan

Under what conditions will the fully opened Psychic Being bring about the supramental transformation by the practice of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga? This paper will attempt to answer the question.

A clear understanding of Sri Aurobindo's use of the term *psychic being* is essential to the practitioner of Integral Yoga. It is found throughout his writings and is a distinguishing feature of his Yoga. As we shall see, it cannot be equated with the English words *soul* or *Self* or with the Indian terms *Atman*, *Jivatman*, or *Purusha*. Although the Psychic Being is present in everyone's heart, it is almost always hidden, and its workings are mingled with the movements of the mind and the vital. Until it emerges in the foreground of the consciousness, individual efforts in Yogic *sadhana* (discipline) remain fitful and limited by these movements. The practice of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga – summarized in the words aspiration, rejection, and surrender – progresses to the extent that the Psychic Being comes to the forefront of one's consciousness. This occurs in four stages.

## What is the Psychic Being?

Sri Aurobindo often refers to it metaphorically as a “spark which comes from the Divine.”

The psychic is a spark come from the Divine which is there in all things and as the individual evolves it grows in him and manifests as the psychic being, the soul seeking always for the Divine and the Truth and answering to the Divine and the Truth whenever and wherever it meets it. (Aurobindo 2012, 105)

But Sri Aurobindo justifies the need for this new term, as distinct from the English word *soul*.

The word soul is very vaguely used in English – as it often refers to the whole non-physical consciousness including even the vital with all its desires and passions. That is why the word psychic being has to be used so as to distinguish this divine portion from the instrumental parts of the nature. (Aurobindo 2012, 112)

As such, it is an emanation, like the soul emanating from the Lord in the monistic theism of Saiva Siddhantha's *Tirumandiram* and Kashmir Saivism. But the Psychic Being is also a key evolutionary concept within Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga (Ganapathy 2012, 439–471; Ganapathy 2010).

The psychic part of us is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with the Divine. In its origin it is the nucleus pregnant with divine possibilities that supports this lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body. There is this divine element in all living beings, but it stands hidden behind the

ordinary consciousness, is not at first developed and, even when developed, is not always or often in the front; it expresses itself, so far as the imperfection of the instruments allows, by their means and under their limitations. It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us, and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements there is developed a psychic individuality – that which we call usually the psychic being. It is always this psychic being that is the real, though often the secret cause of man's turning to the spiritual life and his greatest help in it. It is therefore that which we have to bring from behind to the front in the Yoga. (Aurobindo 2012, 103)

Nor can the Psychic Being be equated with the Atman of Vedanta.

There is a difference between the psychic and the self. The self is the Atman above which is one in all, remains always wide, free, pure, untouched by the action of life in its ignorance. Its nature is peace, freedom, light, wideness, Ananda. The psychic (*antaratma*) is the individual being which comes down into life and travels from birth to birth and feels the experiences and grows by them till it is able to join itself with the free Atman above. The psychic being is concealed in the depths behind the heart centre. The Self has no separate place – it is everywhere. Your self and the self of all beings is the same. (Aurobindo 2012, 106)

But Sri Aurobindo also reminds us that, although the English term is new in his Yogic system, it has an ancient antecedent in the age-old term *hrdaye guhayam*, “the secret heart.”

The psychic being in the old systems was spoken of as the Purusha in the heart (the secret heart – *hrdaye guhayam*) which corresponds very well to what we define as the psychic being behind the heart centre. It was also this that went out from the body at death and persisted – which again corresponds to our teaching that it is this which goes out and returns, linking new life to former life. Also, we say that the psychic is the divine portion within us – so too the Purusha in the heart is described as *Ishwara* of the individual nature in some places. (Aurobindo 2012, 112)

It is secret because it is veiled by surface movements of the inner being composed of the inner mental, inner vital, and inner physical. The Psychic Being expresses itself as best it can through these outer instruments, which are governed more by outer forces than by the inner influences of the psychic. As a soul instrument, the Divine within, its evolutionary influence on human nature is usually hidden. Its will is for the divinization of life and, because of its purity, its action transforms these inner instruments.

It may be perceived as a mystic light behind the heart center.

It may be said of the psychic that it is that [the luminous part of our being], because the psychic is in touch with the Divine and a projection of the Divine

into the lower nature. The psychic is deep within in the inner heart-centre behind the emotional being. From there it stretches upward to form the psychic mind and below to form the psychic vital and psychic physical, but usually one is aware of these only after the mind, vital and physical are subjected and put under the psychic influence. (Aurobindo 2012, 122–123)

As one surrenders to the Divine, egoism – the habit of identifying with the movements of the mind, the vital, and the physical – is replaced by the Psychic Being. This surrender of the ego perspective is the result of the practice of the Integral Yoga, as we will see below.

There is individuality in the psychic being but not egoism. Egoism goes when the individual unites himself with the Divine or is entirely surrendered to the Divine. It is the psychic inmost being that replaces the ego. It is through love and surrender to the Divine that the psychic being becomes strong and manifest, so that it can replace the ego. (Aurobindo 1972, 124)

### **The influence of the Psychic Being, a new evolutionary concept**

Sri Aurobindo stated that the evolutionary task of humanity is more than just reaching a spiritual level of existence. A further objective is the radical and integral transformation of Nature. This will reveal itself as the luminous Consciousness-Force, the trinity of Sat, Chit, and Ananda, whose revelation has yet to be accomplished in humankind as the self-affirmation of the supramental. To this end, when we become aware of the Psychic Being within, it leads the sadhana, the practice by which *siddhi* (perfection) is attained.

We can say that the Psychic Being is the soul in nature, evolving through it, supporting it, and at times when there is an opening to its influence, guiding our person in the drama of life. Sri Aurobindo tells us that it is a new, evolutionary concept that has not been discussed in the older sacred literature, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The psychic being evolves, so it is not the immutable. The psychic being is especially the soul of the individual evolving in the manifestation the individual Prakriti and taking part in the evolution. It is that spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical as the psychic being until it is able to transform the Prakriti of Ignorance into a Prakriti of Knowledge. These things are not in the *Gita*, but we cannot limit our knowledge by the points in the *Gita*. (Aurobindo 2012, 114)

The Psychic Being is the developing soul consciousness manifested for the created being as it evolves. At first, the soul is something essential behind the veil, not developed in front. In front, there is only the body, life, mind. In the evolution, the soul consciousness develops more and more in the created being until it is so developed that it can come entirely in front and govern mind, life, and body. (Aurobindo 2012, 118–119)

There are clear indications of its influence on the inner being, inner mind, inner vital, and inner physical.

These things, love, compassion, kindness, bhakti, Ananda are the nature of the psychic being, because the psychic being is formed from the Divine Consciousness, it is the divine part within you. But the lower parts are not yet accustomed to obey or value the influence and control of the psychic for in men the vital and physical are accustomed to act for themselves and do not care for what the soul wants. When they do care and obey the psychic, that is their conversion – they begin to put on themselves the psychic or divine nature. (Aurobindo 2012, 122)

Unlike the Self, or Atman, which merely witnesses the movements of the mind, emotions, and the senses, the psychic being can exert its influence upon these movements. The parts of the mind, of the vital and the body which can be so influenced by the vital are referred to as the psychic–mental, the psychic–vital, the psychic–physical. This influence can be according to the personality or the degree of evolution of each person ... small or large, weak or strong, covered up and inactive or prominent and in action. (Aurobindo 2012, 108)

These parts may follow their limited aims, natures, or tendencies, or they may accept the psychic’s motives and aims with or without modification.

### **Aspiration, rejection, and surrender: the method of Integral Yoga**

Before discussing the development of the Psychic Being, we must first understand the practice of Integral Yoga. In the following section, I quote extensively from or refer to *The Practice of Integral Yoga* by the late J.K. Mukerjee, who was for many years director of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, and whom I interviewed in 2009. In the words of A.S. Dalal, who wrote its foreword, this work “is a comprehensive treatise on the effective practice of the Yoga of Integral Transformation as propounded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.” It is the first summing-up of the method of their practice, based on their disparate writings and in light of Mukerjee’s own experience over fifty-five years.

#### **On aspiration**

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can be summarized in these two statements: “(1) a steadily mounting ardent aspiration from the side of the sadhaka, and (ii) from the Divine’s side an answering Grace descending from above in response to the sadhaka’s call.” But what is this aspiration? How does it differ from desire? Sri Aurobindo defines aspiration as “a spiritual enthusiasm, the height and ardour of the soul’s seeking ... an upward movement of our consciousness through the psychic part of our being toward all that is good, pure and beautiful.” The Mother describes it as “an inner enthusiasm towards the New, the Unknown, the Perfection ... a yearning, a longing for the contact

with the Divine Force, divine Harmony, divine Love ... an inner flame, a need for the light ... A luminous enthusiasm that seizes the whole being ... a purifying Will, an ever-mounting drive” (Mukherjee 2003, 42–43).

How to develop aspiration? Mukherjee describes its six stages, which are summarized here. First, the development of aspiration begins with an intense dissatisfaction with the habitual ways of human nature. You may wake up one morning and suddenly realize that you are no longer willing to go on living unconsciously, ignorantly, in a state in which you do things without knowing why, feeling things without knowing why, living contradictory wills, living by habit, routine, reactions, understanding nothing. You are no longer satisfied with that. How individuals respond to this dissatisfaction varies. For most, it is the need to know; for others, it is the need to do what is required to find meaning.

Second, the aspirant seeks ardently to escape this hollow human existence by seeking Truth, Love, Peace, Joy, and Being. These are probably still very vague, but the seeker is driven to find release from the present state of nauseating imperfection.

Third, after some time, because of the aspirant’s persistent insistence, Divine Grace responds with a temporary piercing of the veil of ignorance, and one experiences the spiritual dimension of life. One sees the Light, feels Divine Love, or experiences Divine Bliss, the Presence, or Truth, depending on one’s capacity and orientation. It may vary from person to person, but everything else previously experienced in ordinary life pales in comparison.

Fourth, the opening may close, so one must be careful not to forget or doubt it, but rather keep it vibrant and constantly direct one’s aspiration toward its re-emergence.

Fifth, the sadhak will find the attraction to the higher life gradually growing and the attachment to the former, lower life diminishing. Not only might this manifest inwardly in the mental and vital planes, but also outwardly toward friends, even work and pastimes. A new type of yearning and resolution fills the heart and mind, which may express itself as: “O Lord, I want you and you alone. I do not want anything or anyone else except through you and for you. I want to belong entirely to you and will never allow anything to claim my consciousness. I surrender my all to you. Not my will, but Thy will be done. I am yours alone.”

In the sixth stage, the aspiration is so intense that words and prayers, vocal and mental, are no longer needed or even wanted. There is only the flame of spiritual fire rising steadily upward in the background of profound silence. An intense craving to belong to the Divine, to be united with It, and to serve It as a perfect instrument, envelopes the whole expanse of the sadhak’s consciousness. It is a great thirst for Love and Truth, for transformation, for supreme perfection (Mukherjee 2003, 45–46).

### **On rejection**

While still controlled by lower human nature, the sadhak must make some personal effort to progress. This personal effort comprises the three operations of aspiration, described above, as well as rejection and surrender. The Siddhas, and more recently Sri Aurobindo, have insisted that a Yoga sadhak must renounce all habitual movements of the lower nature. These include the mind's opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, and ideas; the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, and hostility to the Truth; and the physical nature's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, obstinacy, pettiness, laziness, sloth, and unwillingness to change.

The goal is the total divine transformation of man's whole being, consciousness, and nature. Every ego-centered impulse and movement arising in the consciousness that does not turn the sadhak toward the Divine is an obstacle in this path. The sadhana of one who aspires to practice Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga includes responding to the constantly troubling reactions to life's ceaseless stream of obstacles. Identifying and removing them make up the yogic sadhana of rejection. There are three classes of them and a different strategy to deal with each. The three classes of obstacles are those of the past, the present, and the future.

When the obstacle is a type that the sadhak has already conquered in the past but is now indulging out of laziness, the sadhak should:

- (i) nip it at its very moment of sprouting, like a piece of dust on one's sleeve; (ii) never brood on it; (iii) take as little notice of it as possible; and (iv) even if one happens to think of it, remain indifferent and unconcerned. (Mukherjee 2003, 55)

The second category of obstacles, those of the present, often appears in the sadhak's consciousness and can even overwhelm it at times. But with sincere effort, the sadhak will discover the power to keep part of the consciousness free from their influence. To deal with this type, the sadhak must have this attitude:

- (i) to apply one's willpower to resist the impulsion; (ii) never to rationalize or legitimize its appearance, but rather to withdraw all inner consent from its manifestation; (iii) never to yield any ground, however limited in extent; (iv) to act as a heroic warrior against the dark tendencies on behalf of the upward-moving forces of light; (v) turn immediately to the Divine and pray constantly and fervently that these weaknesses and impulses of his or her nature be vanquished and removed. (Mukherjee 2003, 55–56)

How to recognize the third category of obstacles within – the deeply hidden potential weaknesses? At their first appearance, almost all of the sadhak's being becomes abnormally disturbed and agitated. The obstacles' roots are so deep and extensive that the sadhak feels that they are an intrinsic and ineradicable part of his or her being, so much so that the sadhak is not at all persuaded of the basic undesirability of these weaknesses. With their appearance, the sadhak temporarily loses the lucidity of his consciousness, as if in a

storm. Most of the *sadhak*'s consciousness is still deeply infatuated with these surging weaknesses and blindly yearns to fulfill some strong desires by letting them manifest. It would be foolhardy to attempt to eradicate such a weakness unaided before one is sufficiently prepared. There is a real danger of suppression of its outer manifestation leading to an internal conflict with that major portion of the *sadhak*'s nature that obstinately clings to the attachment. An explosion is inevitable, disrupting the balance of the being. So, the aspirant should avoid as far as possible these intractable difficulties and refuse to allow them to manifest at all.

Rather the approach should be:

(1) to hold the difficulty or weakness in front of one's consciousness, without becoming scared by it or identified with it, (2) to go assiduously in search of its root cause or source, (3) to try to discover what parts of one's nature are secretly nurturing a fascination for this particular weakness, and are thrown into a turmoil at its slightest beckoning ... (4) always to maintain always a spirit of calm, quiet detachment, throughout the above observation, even if some ugly corners of one's being are exposed ... (5) the *sadhak* has to keep alive in his heart a very sincere aspiration for the eradication of the weakness in question, addressing an earnest prayer to the Divine Mother that through the active intervention of her Grace these deep-rooted and recondite weaknesses and attachments may give up their malignancy and become quite innocuous in nature so that they can be easily faced and overcome ... Such a prayer and aspiration coupled with a thorough self-examination will progressively turn these intractable obstacles first into manageable obstacles of the second class, and finally into easily detachable ones of the past. (Mukherjee 2003, 59–60)

### **On surrender**

Self-surrender to the Divine, at all times and in all circumstances, is the key to the *sadhana* of Integral Yoga as well as the *Kriya Yoga* of Patanjali, who said in *Yoga sutra* I.23, "*Ishvara-pranidhanad-va,*" or "because of one's surrender to the Lord, one successfully achieves cognitive absorption" (Govindan 2012, 17).

The phrase "my God and my all" summarizes its heartfelt expression. The day that a *sadhak* surrenders to the Divine, the Divine itself intervenes in the life of the student and helps remove all difficulties and weaknesses, and brings joy into the consciousness with its Presence.

For this to occur:

(1) the *sadhak* must feel the vanity of one's own self-potency; (2) he must believe with all his heart that there is Someone called Divine who really exists, loves him, and has the omnipotence to do anything according to Divine wisdom;

(3) the sadhak must turn to the Divine alone as his sole and ultimate refuge.  
(Mukherjee 2003, 87)

In the surrendered state of consciousness, whatever one does or feels, all movements are made as an offering to the Supreme Being, in absolute trust, freeing oneself of responsibility for oneself, handing all of one's burdens to the Divine.

The sadhak's habitual consciousness and nature contain ample resistance and obstruction that works against this surrender. One must unreservedly abandon oneself to the sole guidance of the Divine. How to know if one has done so? Sri Aurobindo gives a detailed description of the inner mood of a truly surrendered sadhak.

I want the Divine and nothing else. I want to give myself entirely to him and since my soul wants that, it cannot be but that I shall meet and realize him. I ask nothing but that and his action in me to bring me to him, his actions secret or open, veiled or manifest. I do not insist on my own time and way; let him do all in his own time and way; I shall believe in him, accept his will, aspire steadily for his light and presence and joy, go through all difficulties and delays, relying on him and never giving up ... All for him and myself for him. Whatever happens, I will keep to this aspiration and self-giving and go on in perfect reliance that it will be done. (Aurobindo 1972, 587)

Consequently, it is the Divine itself that takes charge of the entire course of the sadhak's sadhana.

All can be done by the Divine – the heart and the nature purified, the inner consciousness awakened, the veils removed – if one gives oneself to the Divine with trust and confidence and even if one cannot do so fully at once, yet the more one does so, the more the inner help and guidance come and the experience of the Divine grows within. If the questioning mind becomes less active and humble and the will to surrender grows, this ought to be perfectly possible. (Aurobindo 1972, 586–88)

If the power of self-surrender is so potent, why does man fail to do it?

Why is it not done? One does not think of it, one forgets to do it, the old habits come back. And above all, behind, hidden somewhere in the inconscient or even in the subconscious, there is this insidious doubt that whispers in your ear ... and you are so silly, so silly, so obscure, so stupid that you listen and you begin to pay attention to yourself and everything is ruined. (Mother 2004, 257)

Does personal initiative then cease? No, the ordinary sadhak's consciousness and will are far from being united with the Divine's Consciousness and Will, as are a Siddha Yogi's. One continues to live in the separative ego-consciousness with all of its likes and dislikes. The essential principle to follow is to surrender the fruit or results of one's actions to the



Divine; otherwise, one only acts for the ego's satisfaction. Sri Aurobindo describes the attitude one must maintain in all actions.

The Divine is my sole refuge; I trust in Him and rely on Him for everything and Him alone. I am utterly resigned to His Will. I will see to it that no obstacle on the way nor any dark mood of desperation, ever make me waver from my absolute reliance on the Divine. (Mukherjee 2003, 93)

The sadhak, however, should not become complacent, feeling that effort is unnecessary or that the Divine will accomplish everything. This is made very clear.

But the supreme Grace will act only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth; it will not act in conditions laid upon it by the Falsehood and the Ignorance. For if it were to yield to the demands of the Falsehood it would defeat its own purpose. (The Mother 1972, 1,3)

There are conditions for everything. If someone refuses to fulfill the conditions for Yoga, there is no use in appealing for Divine intervention. (Nirodbaran 1983, 197)

An effective surrender does not necessarily ensure the sadhak against all future storms and stresses, but it does assure the absolute security of the sadhak's spiritual health even in the midst of life's tempests. The path is not guaranteed to be sunlit and scattered with rose petals. It has been guaranteed, however, that He will lead the surrendered sadhak to his cherished spiritual goal despite every possible misfortune in life. The surrendered sadhak also knows that misfortune and suffering are not in vain, but are sanctioned by the Divine for fulfilling a necessary spiritual purpose whose significance will be revealed in time. The surrendered sadhak knows and feels that the Divine is not far away or absent during his suffering, but sitting in the heart of his most acute difficulty, guiding the circumstances to lead the sadhak to union with the Divine. The surrendered sadhak also knows that every difficulty will bring great spiritual benefit if faced with courage, patience, and right attitude in a spirit of surrender. Finally, the surrendered sadhak knows that there is an underlying purpose leading to some future spiritual good. His mantra remains: "Let Thy Will be done always and everywhere" (Mukherjee 2003, 101).

### **Four stages in the opening of the Psychic Being**

Having discussed Sri Aurobindo's descriptions of the Psychic Being in the first part of this essay and the three elements of his Integral Yoga in the second part, we can now examine how these three elements, namely aspiration, rejection, and surrender, contribute to the opening of the Psychic Being in four progressive stages.

#### **The first stage**

The Psychic Being remains behind the veil of the inner being and the movements of the mind and vital. The lower parts of our being do not care what the soul wants. They respond

habitually to desires and emotions, the need for physical comfort, and small likes and dislikes. Only occasionally will the psychic's influence become apparent: when there is a turning toward the spiritual life, love and surrender to the Divine, a yearning for the ineffable, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, and an experience of unconditional love, kindness, compassion, Ananda, bhakti.

### **The second stage**

When the inner being, the mind, and the vital “do care and obey the psychic, that is their conversion – they begin to put on themselves the psychic or divine nature” (Mukherjee 2003, 112). As described above, aspiration develops in stages, and the Divine responds with grace. One turns inward and gradually loses interest in the old sources of external sensual attraction. The practice of aspiration, rejection, and surrender progressively opens the influence of the psychic being. More and more, one feels its power to overcome desire, anger, old bad habits, and other manifestations of the ego. One lets go of the past, ceasing to dwell on what has happened. One is intuitively guided to do the right thing, not because of a moral injunction, convention, or the expectations of family and peers, but because one knows inwardly what is true and good. One rejects what resists, what may cause harm, what is untrue or exaggerated. Unconditional love, kindness, ease, and bliss become one's state of being. But one might return to old patterns of thought and feeling. It is intermittently veiled by the movements of the inner being. One must continually strive to witness and not manifest deep-seated, habitual inner movements.

### **The third stage**

The Psychic Being comes from behind the veil of the inner mind and vital to the foreground and remains there. It continuously directs the sadhana of aspiration, rejection, and surrender. It identifies what must be transformed, let go of, and purified. One feels continuously supported and guided. The Divine's Bliss and unconditional love color one's perceptions, even as karma delivers rotten tomatoes to one's doorstep. One abides as effulgent Self-awareness, the master of one's vehicles on the mental, vital, and physical planes. One discerns and lets go of the ego's manifestations in deeper layers of the inner being, including desire and fear. One feels like an instrument in the hands of the Divine, performing surgery, removing all that resists and expresses ignorance of one's Divinity. One becomes a co-creator. Miracles abound in daily life. One experiences life as ever-new joy.

In this stage, the allegiance of the mind, the vital, and even the physical to the ego is replaced by a new allegiance to the Divine within. One seeks perfection, *siddhi*. Perfection in a diseased body or in a neurotic mind is not perfection. With discerning wisdom, the psychic transforms these lower instruments so that they express the Will of the Divine. One develops an enthusiasm for the process of self-transformation. During this process, one discovers what has been hidden. One experiments with methods of transformation.

### **The fourth stage**

At this advanced stage, the Psychic Being transforms the cellular and subconscious levels. From 1926 to 1940, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother experimented with fasting, sleep, food, laws of nature, and habits, testing their own bodies at the subconscious and cellular levels. It was a race against time, not unlike what the Siddhas described in their use of Kaya Kalpa herbs to prolong their lives long enough for the more subtle spiritual forces to complete the divinization. “Fundamentally,” said the Mother, “the question is to know, in this race towards the transformation which of the two will reach first, the one who wants to transform the body in the image of the divine Truth or the old habit in the body of gradually decomposing” (Satprem 1975, 330).

The work proceeded at a level that Aurobindo called “the cellular mind” ... “an obscure mind of the body, of the very cells, molecules, corpuscles” ... “this body mind is a very tangible truth; owing to its obscurity and mechanical clinging to past movements and facile oblivion and rejection of the new, we find in it one of the chief obstacles to permeation by the supermind Force and the transformation of the functioning of the body. On the other hand, once effectively converted, it will be one of the most precious instruments of the stabilization of the supramental Light and Force in material Nature” (Aurobindo 1969, 346).

To prepare the cells, mental silence, vital peace, and cosmic consciousness were necessary to permit the physical and cellular consciousness to enlarge and universalize itself. But then it became apparent that “the body is everywhere,” and that one could not transform anything without transforming everything.

I have been digging deep and long  
Mid a horror of filth and mire  
A bed for the gold river's song  
A home for the deathless fire...  
My gaping wounds are a thousand and one ... (Aurobindo 1952, 6)

Aurobindo and the Mother found that complete transformation is not possible for the individual, unless there is a minimum transformation by all.

“To help humanity out,” remarked Aurobindo, “it was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually, (because) even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay till the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent” (Roy 1952, 251).

“If one wants to do the work singly,” said the Mother, “it is absolutely impossible to do it totally, because every physical being, however complete it be, even though it be of an altogether superior kind, even if it be made for an altogether special Work, is never but partial and limited. It represents only one truth, one law – and the full transformation cannot be realized through it alone, through a single body ... so that if one wants to have a general action, at least a minimum number of physical beings is necessary” (Satprem 1975, 390).

With this realization, the period of individual work ended in 1940, and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother began the third phase of their work of transformation. During this phase, the orientation was toward a global transformation. “This Ashram has been created ... not for the renunciation of the world but as a centre and a field for the evolution of another kind and form of life” (Aurobindo 1969, 823).

It was organized so as to be open to all types of activities of a creative nature, as well as all types of individuals, men, women, and children, of all social classes. Activity in the world was a primary means.

The spiritual life finds its most potent expression in the man who lives the ordinary life of men in the strength of Yoga ... It is by such a union of the inner life and the outer that mankind will eventually be lifted up and become mighty and divine. (Aurobindo 1950, 10)

### **The dilemma of evolutionary leaders and the “atmospheric gulf”**

This third phase began in 1940 and grew out of a dilemma that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother tried to resolve at the end of the second phase. Faced with the collective resistance of the subconscious and inconscient, they examined if they should work out an individual self-transformation in isolation from others and return later to help humanity as its evolutionary leaders. They decided against this strategy because, in Aurobindo’s words, it would result in an “atmospheric gulf” between them and their fellow humanity (Aurobindo 1935, 414). Notwithstanding their opinion that such a strategy was not feasible, Aurobindo also expressed a somewhat conflicting opinion.

It may well be that, once started, the (supramental) endeavour may not advance rapidly even to its first decisive stage; it may be that it will take long centuries of effort to come into some kind of permanent birth. But that is not altogether inevitable, for the principle of such changes in Nature seems to be a long obscure preparation followed by a swift gathering up and precipitation of the elements into the new birth, a rapid conversion, a transformation that in its luminous moment figures like a miracle. Even when the first decisive change is reached, it is certain that all humanity will not be able to rise to that level. There cannot fail to be a division into those who are able to live on the spiritual level and those who are only able to live in the light that descends from it into the mental level. And below these too there might still be a great mass influenced from above but not yet ready for the light. But even that would be a transformation and a beginning far beyond anything yet attained. (Aurobindo 1949, 332)

Is there a notable difference between such an inevitable “division” and the “atmospheric gulf”? If not, then this was not why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not bring the supramental down into their own bodies and fix it there. Furthermore, might not the attainment of the “golden body” by the eighteen Siddhas, Ramalinga Swami, and the

Chinese Taoist Ta Lo Chin Hsien (Golden Immortals) be the early phase of a long collective transformation of all humanity (Govindan 2012, 140–170; Da Lieu 1979, 135)?

In an effort to resolve these issues, this author visited Pondicherry and Vadalur as his book (*Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition*) was nearing completion. He recalled a quotation seen many years before wherein the Mother and/or Aurobindo said in effect that what they were trying to attain had already been attained by Ramalinga Swami nearby, barely 100 years earlier. In previous visits to the Aurobindo Ashram in September 1972 and March 1973, the author had attempted to meet with the Mother to present her with a book on the eighteen Siddhas and to question her on the relationship between Aurobindo's supramental transformation and that of the eighteen Siddhas. The Mother was in seclusion during these visits, and so the questions were left unanswered.

Unknown to the author, similar questions were being posed by T.R. Thulasiram, an inmate of the Aurobindo Ashram since 1969, and its long-time public auditor and accountant. On July 4 and 5, 1990, the author met with Thulasiram in Pondicherry and learned that he had published a two-volume work in 1980 that documents his exchanges with the Mother on the subject of Ramalinga as well as everything Aurobindo had written about Ramalinga. In his exhaustive study, Thulasiram observed: "Sri Aurobindo came to believe in the later part of his life that a few Yogis had achieved supramental transformation as a personal Siddhi maintained by Yoga-Siddhi and not as dharma of nature" (Thulasiram 1980, vol. 1, xi).

On July 11, 1970, the Mother read Thulasiram's letter, which had been sent through Satprem, the Mother's secretary. Attached to Thulasiram's letter was an excerpt from Ramalinga's writing in which he described the transformation of his physical body into a body of light. According to Satprem:

She had no doubt as to the authenticity of his experiences. She liked especially the way the Swamy calls this light "The Grace-Light" and said that this corresponds to Her own experience. To be more precise, the Mother said that the Grace-Light is not the Supramental Light but one aspect of it, or rather one activity of the Supramental. She said that it is quite likely that a number of individuals, known or unknown, have had similar experiences throughout the ages and even now. The only difference is that now instead of an individual possibility it is a collective possibility – this is precisely Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's work, to establish as a terrestrial fact and possibility for all, the supramental consciousness. (July 28, 1970; as published in *Arul*, a Tamil Journal of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in its August 1970 issue; Thulasiram 1980, 900)

Thulasiram was unable to obtain any further clarification from the Mother of the numerous questions raised in his letter. He has also written that "Satprem mistook his (Ramalinga's) dematerialization for death and wrongly reported of this as death to the Mother" (Thulasiram 1989). The Mother also left or withdrew from her body in November 1973, before these questions could be answered. However, Thulasiram's fascinating study

provides much convincing evidence that the transformative experiences of Ramalinga, Aurobindo, the Mother, and the Tamil Siddha Tirumular were all of the same nature. The “golden hue” that Aurobindo manifested in passing was akin to the “golden body” of immortality referred to by Ramalinga, Tirumular in his *Tirumandiram* (Ganapathy 2010), and the literary works of the eighteen Tamil Yoga Siddhas (Govindan 2012, 45).

## **Conclusion**

It appears, therefore, that evolutionary leaders such as these require isolation to complete the fourth stage of the psychic being’s transformation of human nature on all levels into the image of the divine Truth. Whether this occurs only individually, as with the Siddhas, or as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo as a collective evolutionary leap in humanity, the result of the descent of the supramental remains an open question.

## **Related issues requiring future research**

The failure of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to bring down the supramental into humanity raises many related questions. Was his vision of a spiritual evolutionary process for humanity largely a product of the times, under the influence of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origins of Species*, the foundation of evolutionary biology and modern life sciences? How valuable is the application of Integral Yoga without it? How effective is the method of Integral Yoga: aspiration, rejection, and surrender? If it is effective, why is it not being taught systematically by more exponents of Integral Yoga? To what extent do sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga apply themselves regularly to its method as described in this paper?

How can the discovery and opening of the Psychic Being become the means of resolving the imperfections of human nature?

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