

FALL/WINTER 2022/2023

VOL. 47 NO. 3

Collaboration

JOURNAL OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

An aerial photograph of Yosemite National Park, showing the iconic granite cliffs of Half Dome and El Capitan. The foreground is filled with a dense forest of evergreen trees, and a small town is visible in the valley below. The sky is filled with large, white cumulus clouds.

The
American Soul

Even as the individual has a psychic being which is his true self, governing more or less openly his destiny, so too each nation has its psychic being which is its true self, moulding its destiny behind a veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the centre of national aspiration, the fountain-head of all that is beautiful, noble, great, and generous in the life of the country.—The Mother, *On Education, Collected Works of the Mother*, vol. 12, pp. 39–40



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Image: Anrita1705 / Pixabay

Contributors

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JOHN ROBERT CORNELL was introduced to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in 1980 by a teacher in Sacramento, CA. He has been a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association since 2009 and is currently on the editorial and design teams for *Collaboration*. He has a special interest in *Savitri* and the yoga in America.

SUSAN CURTISS was introduced to Sri Aurobindo in 1980 and since then she has been practicing transpersonal counseling psychology with a focus on the psychic being in the healing of trauma. Her passion is researching the gnostic Shaker communities as evolutionary forerunners of Sri Aurobindo’s collective yoga.

LYLA JUNE JOHNSTON is an Indigenous musician, scholar and community organizer of Diné (Navajo), Tsétséhestâhese (Cheyenne), and European lineages. Her dynamic, multi-genre presentation style has engaged audiences across the globe towards personal, collective, and ecological healing. She blends studies in human

ecology at Stanford, graduate work in Indigenous pedagogy, and the traditional worldview she grew up with to inform her music, perspectives, and solutions. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree, focusing on Indigenous food-systems revitalization.

MICHAEL MIOVIC is a clinical psychiatrist and long-time student of the Integral Yoga. He has collaborated extensively with colleagues around the world to apply the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to psychology and psychiatry. He has a special interest in geospiritual studies based upon the seven jewel centers, or chakras, of the Earth Mother.

KAREN MITCHELL joined the Integral Yoga community in 2008. Language has been a passion of hers since childhood. She has written and published a book called: *Woman without a Name: A Wisdom Tale*, available on amazon.com. She is currently writing a collection of poems about language.

BAHMAN A. K. SHIRAZI, Ph.D., studied and worked at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) for nearly four decades. Through the teachings of CIIS founder Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, who brought Sri Aurobindo’s teachings to the West, he discovered Integral Psychology and Integral Yoga, which have provided the inspiration and guidance for his academic and spiritual paths ever since.



Life Sketches:

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

SRI AUROBINDO WAS an author, poet, philosopher, professor, politician, polymath, and master yogi. Born in Calcutta in 1872, he grew up in England and became a classics scholar at King's College, Cambridge University. Proficient in English, French, German, Italian, Latin, and Greek, he returned to India at the age of 21, where he picked up a number of additional languages including Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, and Tamil. He took positions as secretary to a maharaja, professor of French and English, and vice principal and principal, respectively, of two colleges before becoming a leader in India's independence struggle against the British. By late 1907 he was the idol of the nation, traveling city by city as cheering crowds swarmed the train.

Thinking that yoga might give him inspiration and power for his political work, he went to a Maharashtrian guru, Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, for instruction. To Lele's amazement, Sri Aurobindo attained permanent mental silence in three days. From that vast stillness he received higher direction and continued to write articles, edit journals, and deliver inspirational speeches.

The British, dubbing him the most dangerous man in India, arrested him and put him in jail for a year. In solitary confinement, he discovered levels of overhead consciousness between mind and the supreme realms of mystical awareness that had been overlooked in previous spiritual practices. He believed these intermediate levels could bridge the gulf between spirit and matter.

Released after a sensational and highly publicized trial, Sri Aurobindo recused himself from politics and took refuge in the French Indian town of Pondicherry, where from 1914 to 1920 he wrote a number of books simultaneously for journal publication in monthly installments. These volumes included *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of*

Human Unity, War and Self Determination, *The Future Poetry*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *Essays on the Gita*, commentaries on the Upanishads, and *The Renaissance in India*.

He also chronicled his own *Record of Yoga*, a private journal in which he described meticulous experiments in consciousness and the precise development of what today might be seen as X-men capabilities: telepathy, clairvoyance, resistance to pain and fatigue, preliminary levitation, precognition, and sending out one's will to influence people and events.

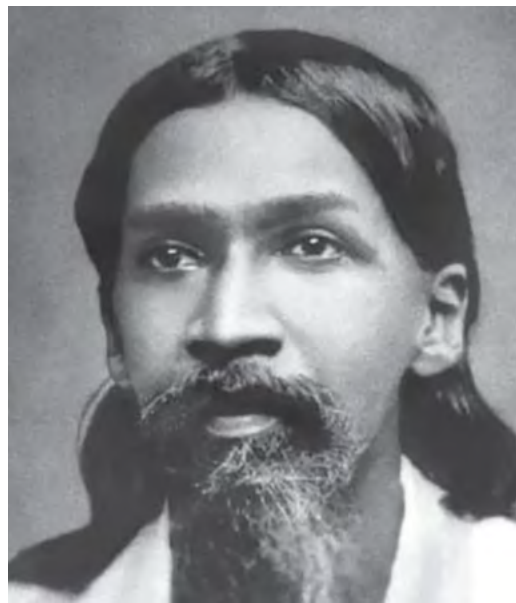
Withdrawing from public engagement in 1926, he continued to write, producing many letters on yoga later published in four volumes, a series of essays describing the divinization of the body and a future gnostic life on earth, and his masterwork, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, a 724-page epic and the longest poem in the English language.

Sri Aurobindo was nominated three times for the Nobel Prize, twice for literature and once for peace.

When he passed away in 1950, his body held a luminous glow for nearly five days in the intense Indian climate, showing no sign of deterioration.

But Sri Aurobindo was not alone in his work. He developed his yogic methodology in collaboration with an equally remarkable woman of Turkish and Egyptian descent named Mirra Alfassa.

Mirra was born in Paris in 1878 and grew up in a well-to-do Sephardic Jewish family. As a teenager, she rebelled against bourgeois values and entered art school at the Académie Julian. She then married French painter Henri Matisse and lived as an artist among artists for ten years, befriending Gustave Moreau, Henri Matisse, Auguste Rodin, and the creatives of the Impressionist era. Her



Images: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi

paintings were exhibited in the prestigious Société du Salon d'Automne art exhibition in 1903, 1904, and 1905.

Despite a secular upbringing, Mirra had had significant spiritual experiences since childhood. She began reading books on Eastern thought and became active in the *Mouvement Cosmique* spiritual tradition. Traveling to Algeria, she trained with noted occultists Max and Alma Theon in 1907–1908.

After her first marriage ended, Mirra studied law at the Académie de Lilleshe and married attorney Paul Richard. The couple went to India in 1914 to meet Sri Aurobindo, founding with him a bilingual French/English philosophical journal called the *Arya*, which ran for six and a half years. At the outbreak of World War I, the Richards returned Paris, then moved to Japan, and eventually returned to Pondicherry in 1920. Paul soon left for the Himalayas, and later granted Mirra a divorce.

Mirra remained in Pondicherry, working with Sri Aurobindo for the next 30 years to establish what they called the supramental consciousness, a vast power of illimitable oneness and integrality that would make possible the transformation of nature and a divine life in the material world.

In 1926 Sri Aurobindo retired into seclusion and turned the management of a growing community of disciples over to Mirra. It was at this time that Sri Aurobindo began to refer to her as “the Mother” and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram began to coalesce.

With the outbreak of World War II, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother put Ashram resources behind the Allies. Devotees from North India began arriving in Pondicherry, fleeing a feared Japanese invasion and bringing their families. The Ashram, formerly a place for seekers who

had forgone family life, now saw children running underfoot. To handle the little ones, the Mother started a school. She taught students, trained teachers, and placed special emphasis on sports, gymnastics, exercises, aquatics, and field games. Defying convention, she outfitted girls in shorts for gym classes.

In 1952 the Mother established the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre, which later became the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE). Today the SAICE curriculum includes humanities, languages, fine arts, sciences, engineering, technology, vocational training, and physical education.

Working to broaden the field of evolutionary yoga, in 1968 the Mother founded Auroville, the City of the Dawn, on a ravaged desert plateau outside Pondicherry. After decades of extensive ecological restoration and the planting of more than three million trees, the plateau today is a verdant forest and Auroville is a world leader in sustainable living. With nearly 3,000 residents from 60 nations, Auroville is also recognized as an international experiment in human unity.

The Mother spent the last 23 years of her life striving to bring the supramental consciousness into matter, turning herself into a living laboratory of transformation. She used her own body as a test bed, working to change autonomic physiological functionings into conscious activity and awaken the “mind of the cells.”

The Mother passed on in 1973 at the age of ninety-five.

Visitors to the samadhi (tomb) of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in Pondicherry (now known as Puducherry) and the Matrimandir, a golden sphere at the center of Auroville, report having powerful spiritual experiences.—

Lynda Lester for the editorial team

EDITORIAL

The American Soul

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, Sri Aurobindo wrote about a new psychological form of communal consciousness emerging in human thought, and the attempt of several nations to find and act from this new sense. He called this new form the *nation soul*. The Mother called it the national genius, the spirit of the people, the center of national aspiration. The first duty and need of every citizen, Sri Aurobindo wrote, is to keep alive and defend this collective soul. For years he himself was deeply engaged in the struggle to liberate his native India from the British Empire.

The need to discover and defend the nation soul seems to have become only more acute a hundred years later, in more than one country. This issue of *Collaboration* finds the United States engaged in a growing struggle over the values and destiny of the American soul here at home. As a result we have taken up the topic, the American Soul, as the theme of this issue. And page by page it's turned into something rich and engaging.

What can be intuited and said about the soul-being of the United States? What is the practice, the “yoga,” of this collective soul that supports and defends its mission in the world and in the destiny of the planet? What might be distinctive qualities of this national yoga and of the Integral Yoga practiced by individuals and groups in this country? These may be acute, living questions for citizens of other nations of the Americas as well.

Sri Aurobindo's “A Message to America,” written in 1949, locates this issue of *Collaboration* in the vast sweep of his cosmic understanding of terrestrial evolution and destiny. He would rather “dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference,” he wrote, while acknowledging that the relative divergence of East and West

“has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.”

Bahman Shirazi's essay, “The American Soul: Essential Qualities and Future Possibilities,” first fills out for us the meaning of the nation soul in Sri Aurobindo's writing. Then he sketches some of the history of this country's peoples—their arrival and interactions—within the context of the qualities and possibilities of the American soul in particular. By realizing its soul potentials, he writes, America may become a bridge to the future evolution of the planet.

In “Report from Gettysburg,” Karen Mitchell creates a poetic visualization of one soldier's experience at Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg address in 1863. Her account illumines the country's soul at work in a historical moment.

“Facing Potentials and Shadows of the United States” is a chapter from Wolfgang Aurose's 2021 book, *The Soul of Nations: Healing and Evolution*. Wolfgang and Soleil Aurose have spent years offering acclaimed workshops on the nation soul in many countries.

“The Shakers: Gift for the American Soul,” by Susan Curtiss, brings to our awareness a unique utopian American experiment. The Shakers, she writes, were a group of people “who believed the Divine could manifest and be a living reality on the physical plane,” not just in an afterlife.

“Spiritual Tips for Living in the United States” offers Michael Miovic's land-based, humor-spiced prescriptions for spiritual survival in this country. Admitting he has not yet met the American soul, Michael turns to the American land itself. “The land of the United States,” he writes, “is very special because she is conscious.” This piece is fun



Image: Camille Minouflet / Unsplash

to read, and gradually we realize that behind the jokes and the Americanisms, there is “substance” and insight into something both unexpected and almost obvious. See what you think.

One of the special delights of this issue is “Hozhó,” originally a spoken-word piece about a central value of the Diné (Navajo) people of the American Southwest. I first saw author and musician Lyla June Johnston deliver this at a conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 2012. You can see that presentation here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tAo9puhnNs>. If Lyla June looks familiar to you, it may be because her mother, Woman Stands Shining, was one of the featured speakers at the 2013 AUM (All USA Meeting) Integral Yoga conference in Ashland, Oregon.

So if this nation soul/American soul topic is so important, where are the centers or institutes exploring it? We’re glad you asked. “Proposal for a Center for the American Soul and Yoga,” which first appeared at that same 2013

AUM, has reappeared in this issue of *Collaboration*. It’s an invitation. Perhaps its time has come.

The *Collaboration* team is deeply grateful to the authors and artists, editors and designers, printers, and all of the many contributors to this issue. Thank you, thank you.—
John Robert Cornell for the editorial team

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A Message to America

SRI AUROBINDO

Editor's Note: The following selection was given in response to a request for a message on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary celebrations in New York on August 15, 1949. You can find it in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 36, pp. 551–553.

I HAVE BEEN ASKED to send on this occasion of the fifteenth August a message to the West, but what I have to say might be delivered equally as a message to the East. It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but, for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move.

There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under

an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before.

There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers. It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realisation of a common ideal, the destined goal, the fulfilment towards which Nature in her beginning obscurely set out and must in an increasing light of knowledge replacing her first ignorance constantly persevere.

But what shall be that ideal and that goal? That depends on our conception of the realities of life and the supreme Reality.

Here we have to take into account that there has been not any absolute difference but an increasing divergence between the tendencies of the East and the West. The highest truth is truth of the Spirit; a Spirit supreme above the world and yet immanent in the world and in all that exists, sustaining and leading all towards whatever is the aim and goal and the fulfilment of Nature since her obscure inconscient beginnings through the growth of consciousness is the one aspect of existence which gives

a clue to the secret of our being and a meaning to the world. The East has always and increasingly put the highest emphasis on the supreme truth of the Spirit; it has, even in its extreme philosophies, put the world away as an illusion and regarded the Spirit as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the world, on the dealings of mind and life with our material existence, on our mastery over it, on the perfection of mind and life and some fulfilment of the human being here: latterly this has gone so far as the denial of the Spirit and even the enthronement of Matter as the sole reality. Spiritual perfection as the sole ideal on one side, on the other, the perfectibility of the race, the perfect society, a perfect development of the human mind and life and man's material existence have become the largest dream of the future. Yet both are truths and can be regarded as part of the intention of the Spirit in world-nature; they are not incompatible with each other: rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.

The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world; but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution. An evolution has been admitted by certain minds in the East, certain philosophies and Scriptures, but there its sense has been the growth of the soul through developing or successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. For if there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness; it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a return of the soul to earth in many successive lives, in many successive bodies.

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscious and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work; but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There



Image: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi

is a truth-consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfected body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit.