

The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



The Mother's Artistic
Training at the Académie Julian

Mother said many times: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives — he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me."

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother's love, Her Presence is there always.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana '79

About ten years ago a group of American visitors had come to the Ashram and I was asked to show them around. They were from the Edgar Cayce Association and were on a tour of ashrams in South India. Edgar Cayce had been a sort of mystic healer who could see and hear things that others couldn't. The group ate at the Dining Room, visited a few departments and meditated around the Samadhi in the evening. The next day by a coincidence was the 1st of December and they watched the performance at the Theatre. As we were going back to their hotel one of them asked me, "How is it that the Ashram is so beautiful? None of the ashrams we have seen on this tour were anywhere near this one in cleanliness and beauty."

I told him that the Mother was an artist so it was normal for our Ashram to be a place of beauty. When the group had left I reflected on this aspect of the Ashram life. The Mother had made sure that we were always surrounded by beauty. So much attention was paid to details and so much was done to give a priority to aesthetics. The Mother was an accomplished artist but if you go to the art gallery you will find only a few paintings by her. In fact, her artistic taste was expressed in everything she did. She was an embodiment of good taste, refinement and harmony.

We have taken this fact absolutely for granted. We have grown up seeing beauty all around us so we imagine that there is nothing unusual about it. When we enter the Ashram Main Building we are greeted with the loveliness of flowers. Notice the pink and white "Protection" flowers against the grey of the wall or the delicate leafy creepers. The carefully arranged flowers on the Samadhi are a source of endless joy. Sit in the School courtyard and admire the stage, decorated with terracotta tiles, under the tree. Eat in the Dining Room and

notice the harmonious proportions of the dishes, bowls and glasses.

The Mother has said: "On the physical plane it is in beauty that the Divine expresses Himself." When I first saw that sentence, written in her handwriting, at the Art Gallery, I was relieved. I had always thought that since I was not very spiritually advanced there would never be a great revelation in which the Divine would appear before me, no splendid vision and no *Vishwaroopa*. But there, in front of me, was a message saying that the Divine was revealing himself at every moment. In fact, He is saying, "Look at me, Look at me!" All I have to do is open my eyes and look for beauty.

The Mother made it clear that beauty was a part of our spiritual life. Developing an aesthetic sense is required for the growth of the vital being.

Parichand-da had told us in a talk he gave to the students how he had once gone to the Playground wearing a shirt which had a tear near the sleeve. He knew that the shirt was torn but he went all the same, thinking: "It just shows that I am not vain, that I am not interested in outer appearances." The Mother noticed his shirt from far and called him. She told him never again to wear anything that was torn. She explained that it was a sign of neglect and *tamas* and not of simplicity, that it was a negation of beauty. Parichand-da added that he was very moved that the Mother's eyes noticed the smallest thing and it showed how concerned she was for her children.

The Mother herself went through a period of preparation before she came to us. She has said that her training in fine arts was necessary for the development of the vital. We bring you in this issue some information on the Académie Julian where the Mother learnt to draw and paint, a place which had a great importance in her life. ❧

PLURALISM

Lopamudra '94 shares her thoughts

It's Christmas Eve 2015 and the Human Resources lady has come to announce an early closure of office. She wishes us "Happy Holidays" and then asks meekly if she can wish us "Merry Christmas". Suddenly the festive mood collapses before my eyes and I realize I am in the US, a secular country that rewards political correctness over human tenderness. Greeting cards and billboard signs have "Happy Holidays",

not "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Hanukkah". One day this same lady had shared something personal with me. She was Palestinian Christian and she suffered the loss of Home, although the event had happened in her grandmother's time. Now

she wanted to share her joy of the Lord's birth anniversary and for this too she needed permission!

In the Ashram Christmas was always a big day – Bada Din – as it is called in some Indian languages. While we primarily celebrated it as a day of Light, we had also absorbed its cultural connotations. It never crossed my mind that we were doing something politically incorrect. Come to think of it, most of us were "Hindus". So were we wrong? No, we were practising pluralism, without knowing it. We were opening ourselves to understand others, incorporate their best practices, share in their joys. Just baby steps towards universalizing ourselves, becoming the global person, the *vishwamanav*; which are perhaps themselves steps towards a cosmic consciousness. All this ran through my head in a split second while I stared at the HR lady. Then I told her, "Of course wish us Merry Christmas!" She did and we all wished her back.

We, as in human society, have only recently developed a centipede personality. First we created a hundred legs for ourselves; now we are entangled and are lying in a ditch. We have experimented with many shades of secularism and have forced the creation of madrassas and Sunday schools of various denominations. Since regular schools have to remain mum on the subject of religion, these had to fill the need. And their efforts are welcome, but unfortunately they tend to teach exclusionism. So much so that religion has come to mean sectarianism and has veered off from its origin of spirituality. Now in this fractured world the call for pluralism seems even more urgent. This at a time of free flow of information, a plethora of movies of other cultures and books translated from other languages! When one looks a little closely one realizes there is no paradox. *Many* more people know what exists in *some* parts of the world, and that these are out of reach for them – from food and shelter to freedom of speech and travel.

But there is good news. If not heads of state, people are coming close in many ways. There are innumerable charities, free online courses, exchange programs, internships, Auroville-style communities, scholarships for foreign students, and schools such as ours. Many schools around the world are introducing culture studies from an early age. The Waldorf schools for example. They too realize the importance of teaching different languages. One of the easiest ways of entering a person's world is to see it through their eyes, expressed in their native tropes. Sri Aurobindo explains this in detail in the chapter "Diversity in Oneness" in *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Twin town or sister city projects are already in place. Especially after World War II the twinning of towns belonging to opposite sides of the war grew in momentum. Student exchange programs, art works exchanges, exhibitions and trade ties followed. It also created a platform for sharing

research, subject matter experts, know-how and solutions to problems. The Indian town of Damman, which was a Portuguese colony for 400 years, is twinned with Coimbra in Portugal.

Similarly twin school programs can begin where students are paired across conflict zones to do a project together, such as decide how the waters of a river can

be shared best. I remember when we were in Delafon, some thirty years ago, which means before the computer age, our teachers had paired us up with students from a school in France. The letters came in one big

package and ours went out together too. My penfriend's name was Geneviève. She sent me a silver cross, which I treasured, not knowing its cultural value until later. One of the French students asked if we knew what a TV was and if snakes roamed our streets. That partnership did not last long. Now we know the protocols of engagement. Ask, do not assume. Sympathize, do not pity.

Another way to create a global consciousness is to travel. People who have done an internship in another country have always returned much enriched. Since travel can be expensive, cultural artifacts should travel. Museums already have exchange programs in parts of the world where museums have good funding. If museums could be taken to far reaches of the world, they would create so much more understanding. Last year a Saudi Arabian exhibition came to where I stay in the US and I was thoroughly impressed. I did not even know the incense trade was as robust as the silk route, and that those desert countries had so much sculpture and architecture. Technology will revolutionize travel yet again. Virtual Reality gadgets will give us the experience of being in a place concretely, like we were really standing there. You will not have to climb Machu Picchu or walk through jungles to see the marvels of human civilizations.

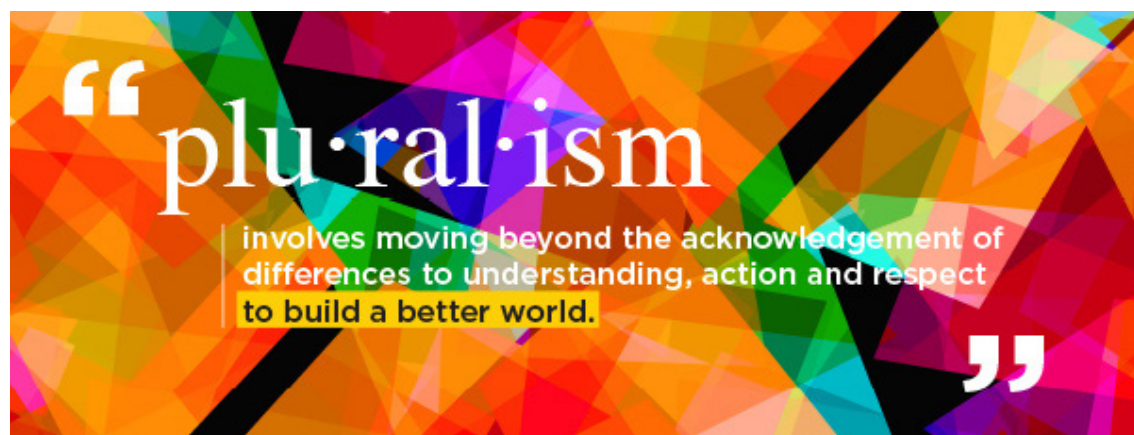
Japan has evolved a program that addresses travel, education, people-to-people diplomacy and exposure to other cultures, all at once. After World War II a youth program was started to enable the new generation in Japan to mingle with their counterparts around the world. 140 Japanese and 140 young people from other countries travel

aboard a ship for about 40 days. This is the "Ship for World Youth Program" that has by now travelled the world many times over. Participants also work out peace programs and are taught leadership skills.

I remember learning Sanskrit by reading

the Gita, getting familiar with Greek Gods through Sri Aurobindo's writings, getting acquainted with Buddhism through Mother's commentaries on the *Dhammapada*. These are things schools in the rest of India are barred from doing. I wish our kind of secularism would be to study wisdom literature of all religions instead of none at all. But when it came to history I cannot say we got an unbiased view. The problem is not only in our school but all over. Whenever I read an article or a textbook or see a documentary or even an exhibition, I check who the sponsor is. The World Expos in the late 1800s for example showed the colonized people as artifacts of culture, like some exotic pottery. The term "orientalism" was later coined to critique it. I would rather trust the Indophile British writers of the Asiatic Society than the British Empire's scribes. If a country "needs to open its market", does it by chance mean it needs to sell its natural resources at lower prices? Similarly the militant Islam currently in circulation is only the richest publisher's views, not what Islam is. In the US, Christopher Columbus is quickly losing his high station. Some States do not observe Columbus Day as a national holiday, but have changed it to "Indigenous People's Day". The World Expos of the last few decades have become meeting grounds for intercultural exchanges.



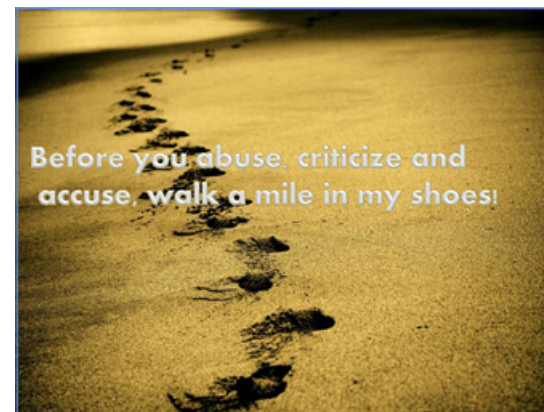


As children the economic ties between India and Russia gave us an opportunity to read Russian fairy tales. Walt Disney brought the Arabian Nights and Kurosawa the samurai. European fairy tales and *Amar Chitra Kathas* were the staple. But so many other cultures were absent. There are many subjects a student has to learn and only so much time. A choice has to be made. Some of my personal preferences would be to balance Western literature with contemporary indigenous voices. Keep some Shakespeare and Wordsworth but add *Roots* to learn about the African slave trade, or *Wild Swans* to understand the Chinese people, *And Quiet Flows the Don* for Russia, Isabel Allende for South America, the poetry of Rumi, Neruda and Maya Angelou... For history read various points of view, and not be in a hurry to take sides. There is always more to learn. The important point is to create exposure and widen the foundation; there will always be time to dive deep later. For that online courses are available and adult education is spreading.

I am visiting Pondicherry and am quite content about the consciousness expanding program I have followed. My mind is full of posters like "Walk a Mile in my shoes before you judge me", "Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that", and our student's prayer, "Make of us the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born, against the past that seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we may be ready to receive them."

Then I am awakened at the wee hours of the morning with a loudspeaker. No, actually three: the azan from the mosque, the temple playing Suprabhatam and the church choir accompanied by a thundering organ. They are competing with each other in a most un-Godly manner! In an instant I hate them all. I rant – that is why American secularism is the best kind. "Nothing Goes" is better than "Everything Goes". To add to it the hypocrisy of the Indian brand is that religion is thrown out of schools but allowed to exist as public nuisance. Then I pause. How can we take the sap out of a people by stopping idols doing their city rounds and Muharram processions? So the American system is not the best after all! But these festivals don't happen daily! Besides people are free to join or abstain. But with a loudspeaker challenging your peace of mind you are necessarily co-opted.

Now I am fully awake and I realize I cannot practise pluralism alone. I will be crushed by the elephant while the mahout's warnings are ignored. Will a temple give up air time if the mosque is allowed to claim it? Thus we need laws – something a mature pluralist society would not need. Fine the noise polluters, snap the electric supply of defaulters. Do it across the board for all religions. Include secular festivities, such as marriages and political harangues. Pluralism does not mean "loving all no matter what". We need to cry out against injustice, against ill-treatment, exploitation. We need to form human rights commissions, awareness groups, participate in



forums... but only after we have walked a mile in their shoes.

If everyone practised the golden rule of treating others as they would like to be treated, already many problems would be solved. If they then practised seeing the divine in each one, the rest of the problems would be solved. Of course many religions don't accept this as a fact. But all religions believe in compassion. Meanwhile one must keep pushing for change – within and without. When I get too impatient I remember the Serenity Prayer, "God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, Courage to change the things which should be changed, and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

"Be the change you want to see in the world" is a good starting point, but it's not a game one can play alone. Also, what appears as a good change for one may not be good for another. So even if people were compassionate they could end up as antagonists. There isn't one rule to fit all problems; each situation needs its own creative solution, a solution that would need to change with the changing times. Meanwhile we can broaden our horizons and prepare to be fit instruments of



the Divine. And in the silence of our surrendered being remember the Sufi's words:

*The Ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Right or Left, as strikes the Player goes;
And he that toss'd Thee down into the Field,
He knows about it all – He knows – HE knows! ☸*

Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of selfdevelopment on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the Spirit. It is the practical recognition of this truth, it is the awakening of the soul in man and the attempt to get him to live from his soul and not from his ego which is the inner meaning of religion, and it is that to which the religion of humanity also must arrive before it can fulfil itself in the life of the race.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 25: 570)

AMATEUR ARCHAEOLOGIST

Norman '60 shares his passion for the subject

Can you tell us something about your visit to Turkey?

A lot of my friends have mentioned the fact that they can't understand why I am interested in archaeology. It's all dead. Archeological sites are boring, so they don't know why I am interested in archaeology. Even a famous archaeologist once said "I suddenly realized that there is no future in the past". So it's very difficult to explain my interest in archaeology.



I went to a place called Göbekli Tepe in Turkey which is, as far as it is known today, the oldest archaeological site. It is twelve thousand years old. And when you are standing there in the archaeological site and you are looking around you see these square pillars, some of them are 'T'-shaped. They have some very nice carvings of foxes, lizards, scorpions on them. And it suddenly dawns on you, that you are looking at something extraordinary, that there were human beings here twelve thousand years ago. And this chill goes down your spine. I don't know how to share this with people. You either feel it or you don't.

And I had the same feeling when I was in Malta. It's not that old, it's 8000 years old. But

if you stand in the circle of carved rock, which was a temple, you see what looks like a very fat lady, who has got very wide hips and who was a goddess as far as we know. You realize that people who were there, they had borne their offering of grains. And again all this had happened 8000 years ago.

Have you been to Mohenjodaro?

No I have not been to Mohenjodaro, but I have just come back from a village called Rakhigarhi, in Haryana, which has one of the largest archaeological sites of that civilization in India. It's about 170 miles from Delhi. If you go to the National Museum in Delhi, they have got a room only for the Indus Valley Civilisation and they have got artefacts from Rakhigarhi there.

What did you see there?

Well, they have excavated the



▲ Archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe in Turkey.

► Detail of carvings on pillar from Göbekli.

old buildings. The bricks are there. But most of the bricks were stolen by locals to build their own houses today. The bricks are still solid, in perfectly good condition. When you look at Indus Valley, you are looking at something that is 5000 years old. The bricks have been there for 5000 years. It's a compliment to their



◀ Rakhigarhi in Haryana – a site of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

► A skeleton unearthed at the site.



if you get a permit you are allowed to actually dive there.

What benefits do you get from this knowledge of the past?

None what-soever. It's just the evolution – I hope – the evolution of my mind.

What do you think of these fantastic drawings of animals in caves and walls etc. They look so modern as though they were painted this year. Their sense of

What do you mean by modern? You mean the way it is painted or the colour.

No, I think that we have come a full circle. I mean, we started like that and now we are back to the same style. Modern abstract art looks so much like prehistoric art.

We think that they were – we use the word loosely – "primitive". We use the word "civilization". The aborigines of Australia who, as far as we know, came from Asia into Australia, about 50000 years ago, possibly even earlier, are considered uncivilized because they didn't have buildings, didn't have carvings, they didn't cut block, they didn't build anything. They had no formal structures. But if you study their thought, their mythology, what we call mythology, it is highly evolved. Their dreams, their concepts, the knowledge, all that they know... there is nothing uncivilised about it. For instance they know that volcanic rock came from far. How did they know that? And what happened long before they came? We know it. We know it came from far, but they also know that. So they must have had knowledge, that even we don't know, don't have any idea about, because it took us years and years of studying strata, different types of rocks and

skill that we still want to use them. They had collected rain water, they had sewage. Their toilets were flushed out by water not in the same flushing system that we have but they had water going through the toilets to wash it all out – 5000 years ago! When I went to Melbourne in 1976, some of the outer villages didn't have that.

I was at Stonehenge this summer and they have realised that it is much older than they thought it was. What do you think of that?

The trouble with places like Stonehenge which is made purely out of rock is that it's almost impossible to date it.

You know from what is buried. There were some carvings. Can you not know from that?

Even that is very contentious. When it was built... Did people interfere with it later? Was it compromised? If you get pottery, there are ways to date it. If there is organic material one can use carbon dating. With rocks you can't.

What I wanted to say is that one doesn't know how to share this wonderment. It's just that when you are in such a place you realize that it was the beginning of human life and civilization. How hard it must have been for them to make those simple things that we take for granted, everything we have now, even the smallest thing must have been such a great effort and a big sense of wonderment for them. So, are you studying archaeology now?

Yes, I am an amateur.

What about ancient sites which are under water? Do you know anything about them?

There are sites like Mahabalipuram and Poompuhar but as far as I know the Indian Government doesn't allow diving on those sites. Only

all that. But they didn't do all that. They simply know of that, that it came from far.

Can you tell us something more about what you saw in Turkey?

One of the most interesting things is the mysteries of these underground paintings and caves and cave work. I visited an underground city. This underground city has 5 layers and goes down 60 metres – 60 metres underground! – and it is capable of holding up to twenty thousand people and it is simply a complex of tunnels and chambers. One of the mysteries there is that they obviously didn't have electricity like we do, so they would have used some form of oil lamps. But you do not find anywhere any soot on the ceilings. And it is still a mystery to most of the archaeologists as to how they managed this, because they would have been there for very long periods of time, sometimes because these cities were built for hiding when the country was invaded. And they held almost twenty thousand people, plus cattle, goats, dogs, sheep. They were all taken down there.

They had air shafts which went up all the 60 metres for the air flow, hot air rising, fresh cold air coming in. They had to correct their architecture because the original air shafts doubled up as the wells at the bottom and the enemy would pour poison down the air shafts and poison the water. So then if you go and look at the wells, they are shifted away from the air shafts. All that sort of thing happened. Nowhere do you see any soot.

And even in the pyramids where they have these wonderful paintings inside these tunnels there is no soot, there is no soot from the oil lamps supposedly, the oil lamps that they must have used. If you ask the guides in Turkey how they managed that, they said that they used linseed oil. The linseed oil diminishes the amount of soot but does not eliminate it completely. So those are the mysteries you face when you study archaeology.

The Government takes good care of the sites?

The trouble is that in Turkey which is a country that for 2000 years at least has been the crossroad of cultures, crossroad of races of people coming in from the west to the east and from the east to the west, there are just so many sites. It is so much like in India, so much so that the Government can't look after everything. So it has to be selective and take certain more prominent sites and protect those. Even Göbekli in Turkey which I told you about, which is 12000 years old, one of the oldest sites in the world, is mostly funded by people living overseas and it was a German who



Göbekli Tepe is situated on a mount.

had been working there for probably 20 years now and who died recently, who was doing most of the excavation work.

Is the excavation work going on even now?

Yes, it is continuing. They have excavated probably only one tenth of what is there. What is interesting about Göbekli is that it is a mount. So the site originally was high up and the building could not have been buried naturally. Many archaeological sites are cities, like Troy for example, which gradually got buried as sand blew in from the desert. The famous Sphinx in Egypt at one stage was up to its neck in sand and had to be dug out. But for Göbekli, they don't know who actually built it, who the people were and why they left. But before they left they buried everything.

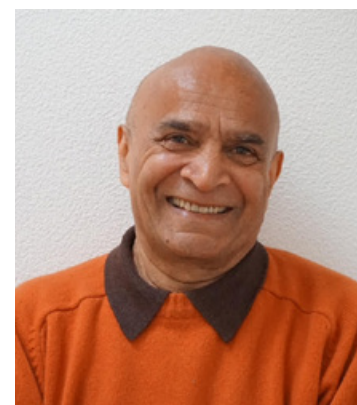
I could tell you a lot more but I'll end here. ☼

PSYCHONEUROIMMUNOLOGY

Dr. Madhusudan Patel '61, who is based in Germany, tells us about the power of the human brain and mind, and the "integral" or "holistic" approach for health and success in life through the science of Psychoneuroimmunology

INTRODUCTION

Humanity is going through an important period of social, political, emotional, economic, and environmental change. Such a period automatically creates in the outer material world a



state of confusion, and in the inner emotional world of almost everyone a state of insecurity, worry, anxiety, fear, and instability. As a result there is a high rate of health problems within the workforce, and within the public in general. Consequently, the cost of

health services is rising. Businesses and industries are suffering economic losses due to lower productivity, and higher rates of absenteeism, eventually even leading to shut-downs and thereby creating a higher rate of unemployment. This turmoil, and change within the outer world is a contributing factor to various problems that in turn have significant impact on human health, and on human well-being in general. Good health and well-being are the cardinal factors for the survival, growth, and evolution of this Divine Creation (our world), and therefore "healthy human beings" are the starting point for everything else on this planet earth.

My definition of good human health is based on what I personally feel and experience physically and emotionally. It is also based on what my patients and clients personally feel and experience physically and emotionally. However, good health is not just the absence of disease or illness from

the physical human body. In very simple terms, I define "good health" as a state of well-being within which an individual feels totally satisfied with her or his physical, mental, emotional, psychological, economic, material, social, and spiritual life, a life that I call an "Integral Life". In other words, good health is a harmonious combination of various physical and non-physical factors within and outside the anatomical body.

THE MEDICAL SCIENCE OF PSYCHONEUROIMMUNOLOGY

Your brain is molecular, whereas your mind is not. One could say, "thoughts" originate in your brain; they are "cerebral". Your brain is the source of your "emotions." I would say your "mind" has its origin in the "soul" (life energy). Your noble "inspirations" arise from your mind. I call "mind" the voice of man's "soul". The various faculties of brain and mind interact with one another through processes involving diverse physiological and biological reactions, and through personal and cosmic "occult energies" (occult or invisible because one can't see them with physical eyes).

Your "brain" and your "mind" are the major players involved in the process of attaining and maintaining a harmonious balance in your body, and for you to live a life of "Integral Health," a life of lasting satisfaction. However, they are also the major conspirators and instigators of disease and illness. Historically, medicine in modern society has defined its mission in terms of curing disease (the medical disorder) while overlooking illness (to treat the medical condition while ignoring people's emotional state). In other words, it has been ignoring the relationship between mind and body, and the interaction between their diverse faculties.

The interrelationship between the various

THE MOTHER IS BY MY SIDE

In a letter to an Ashram friend Madhusudan shares his experiences of his contact with the Mother.

The Mother had told me, before I left for my studies: “My son, go and fulfill your Mission. When the time comes, I will bring you back here. And every time you need me I will be there with you to help and to guide you. You must leave *in order to fulfill the reason for which I brought you to earth. However, you will never be alone because I will be constantly with you. Go my son, go courageous like a soldier, strong like a saint.*”

Talking about being “courageous and strong,” let me tell you an interesting anecdote regarding the Mother and my childhood: We were kids, and one day three girls, Purnima (Tara’s little sister), Kokila, and Tarulata, went to the Mother and asked Her to give them new names. The Mother looked at them and then spontaneously gave them the

names – Do, Re, Mi. When I learnt about this, I who went to the Mother every morning, asked Her to give me also a new name. She looked at me, caressed my face, thought, and said that She needed time so that She could research my name. I was disappointed because She had given the others their new names spontaneously, and did not understand why She needed to research the meaning of my name. The next day She said to me: “My son, your name “Madhusudan” is one of the names of Shri Krishna,

and means “Vainqueur,” and that is “Who” you are. You are a “Conquerer!” And so I will not change your name. I was very disappointed because I thought: “What a stupid name, a boy with twenty hearts, “vingt coeurs!!” My French at that time was not very strong. The Mother had insisted that I speak to Her only

in French, and She never ever spoke to me in any other language. As a matter of fact, She



Madhusudan is sitting in the middle in front of the Mother

functions and systems within the body were unknown until Robert Ader in the US, rather recently, discovered that the immune system, like the brain, could learn. His finding was a shock; the prevailing wisdom in medicine had been that only the brain and central nervous system could respond to experience by changing how they behaved. Ader’s finding led to the investigation of what are turning out to be myriad ways the central nervous system and the immune system communicate — biological pathways that make the mind, the emotions and the body not separate, but intimately entwined.

Francesco Varela, at Paris’s Ecole Polytechnique, discovered that the immune system was like the “body’s brain,” defining the body’s own sense of self — of what belongs within and what does not. Immune cells travel in the bloodstream throughout the body, contacting virtually every other cell. Those cells they recognise, they leave alone; those they fail to recognise, they attack. The attack either defends us against viruses, bacteria, and cancer or, if the immune cells misidentify some of the body’s own cells, creates an autoimmune disease such as allergy or lupus. Until the day Ader made his unexpected discovery, medical

taught me French. I later understood the meaning of my name and accepted it as a personal truth; and knowing and being “Who” I am is the reason why and how I have fought for “Truth,” “Justice,” and for “The Divine Cause.”

This revelation by the Mother as to “Who” I am has helped me to overcome my inner solitude, and deep emotional wounds. Remember, my friends, that I was born in a very large family. The Mother liberated me from my biological family and brought me up personally, and within a much larger spiritual family. I was merely in my twenties when I left for my studies, with only five dollars in my pocket, and ever since then I have lived a life of total inner solitude. Even though I have now been married for almost forty-eight years, and my work is 100% related to human beings, I have never ever had anyone that I could lean on. Had it not been for the fact that I am “strong,” “courageous,” and most of all because of the fact that *my Divine Mother has always been, and always is, by my side*, I would have left this world long long ago. She taught

me to be *totally “non-attached”, even to life itself, but to be dedicated and to be true to the Divine Cause in my life.* And so you see and understand, my dear friend, why I am the most fortunate

being on this planet earth! Yes, now and then, pain and suffering pass through me and awaken me to the fact that I am living within a “biological body”.

Now let me get back to “the wonder of your mail to me!” Though the Mother always comes to me when I call Her, I do so only when others, such as my

patients, need Her. I have never been a “cry-baby” stuck to Her divine bosom! She surely did not bring me here so that I use Her as my personal and constant “crutch.” For my personal need of Her presence, and for Her guidance, I don’t call Her. I leave it up to Her to “intervene” when She decides. Her interventions in times of my personal needs, such as in 1961, come in forms of consolations, complete solutions, and/or guidance regarding how I can overcome the moments of suffering, pain, and inner torment. She uses various means to do this for me. One



Prize distribution at the School – Madhusudan is standing extreme left.

science believed that the brain (along with its extensions throughout the body via the central nervous system) and the immune system were separate entities, neither able to influence the operation of the other. For example, that there was no pathway that could connect the brain to the areas of bone marrow that manufacture T cells (immune cells). Or so it had been thought for a century. The similarity between the immune system and the nervous system is that they both are self-regulating and control the responses of the body to the environment. The immune system, like the nervous system, can remember, learn,

and so can adapt, not in a cognitive sense, but in a physiological one. The interaction between the mind, the nervous system, and the immune system provides a physiological basis for the influence of emotions on health. This interaction takes place through an energetic process within which the brain plays a very significant role. Evidence for the strength of this interaction is demonstrated by the fact that stress experienced by the nervous system hampers the functioning of the immune system, and that immune responses can be conditioned like Pavlov’s dogs learning to salivate at the sound of a bell.

of these means is Her “instrument” or “messenger” called “X.” Remember the time when you were “instrumental” in the shift of my “work” from Germany to Turin, Italy? Yes dear friend, that too was a time when I needed Her intervention because I was going through a very difficult period regarding my “work satisfaction,” and other inner difficulties. In a later conversation with Her, prior to settling in Sardinia and in Turin, She told me that it was important that I move to Italy to continue my “mission”. Her Grace opened all the doors in this divine country that I love with my heart and soul. Her spiritual followers in Italy created Her Spiritual Centre, in Turin, called “Centro Mirra,” “Centro spirituale per la vita integrale – mente, corpo, anima, materia.” They made me the president of this centre where I give seminars, lectures, and hold meditations. I do my medical work from the premises provided by the centre. I fly all over Europe for my work, but it is here in Italy that I felt totally at home. I say “felt” because over a year ago my wife expressed a longing to return to Germany, and to be near her family in Dresden. So we moved our official residence to Dresden, a little over a year ago. However, I kept my practice in Turin open and spent part of the month in Italy.

Ever since this move to Dresden an “inner crisis” has begun. The atmosphere of Germany and Italy are quite different and my soul felt much more “at home” in sunny, spontaneous Italy. I keep thinking about my “Divine Child-

hood” in the Ashram. However, I know that I have to help my wife and that it is my sacred duty that I be near her in her time of need. I am 78 and I am very aware that I must do what is right for my “mission.” I keep remembering the Mother’s words that She will bring me back to the Ashram when the time is right. I know that this will happen, and I know that I would love to devote my time to working under our dear Manoj-da, perhaps teaching in our school! I even had thought of calling you some time ago, dear friend, because you are the only person who I can talk to about all this.

And then happened the miracle of receiving your mail! The moment I opened your mail, *immediately I was with the Mother, in Her Divine arms*, just as in Sacré-Cœur¹, Paris, and with Sri Aurobindo, as once before in Sedona, Arizona. All and everything within me was abolished but Their Presence alone. No words or thoughts needed to be exchanged. And nothing but the energy of Their Divine Grace prevailed over our meeting. Suddenly all is as it should be and I am totally liberated. Every cell in my body is full of Their Divine Energy and Love. And I am back on the path of my “Divine Mission”. Nothing will ever stop me because of their love and presence. And I on my part will never ever fail them, for they are the sole reason of my life. I don’t pretend to be spiritual, or even a devotee, I am merely loyal and grateful to them for the “Love” and for the “Mission” they have bestowed on me.

1. See next article by Maurice for complete story.

Over the years since then, Ader’s important discovery has forced a new look at the links between the immune system and the central nervous system. The field that studies this, Psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI, is now a leading edge medical science. Its very name acknowledges the links: *psycho*, or “mind”; *neuro*, for the neuroendocrine system (which subsumes the nervous system and hormone systems): and *immunology*, for the immune system. This young medical discipline has made it quite clear that the person’s inner states (emotions, psychological attitude, imagery, and

intentions) play a crucial role in both the cause and the cure of even physical illness. In other words, an individual’s inner state is a key ingredient in any comprehensive medical care. Visualisation, affirmation, and conscious use of imagery have been shown to play a significant role in the management and cure of most illnesses, and outcomes have been shown to depend on emotional states and mental outlook. The “mind” and the “brain” play a cardinal role within the process of management and cure of all illnesses, and also for resolving various problems in life.

AN INTEGRAL APPROACH TO INTEGRAL HEALTH/LIFE

Psychoneuroimmunology is the first medical science that has brought about in medicine an integral approach or a holistic approach for treating patients. Orthodox or conventional medicine deals almost entirely with the physical organism using physical intervention: surgery, drugs, medication, and behavioural modification. Medicine, as practised in general, believes essentially in the physical causes of physical illness, and therefore prescribes mostly physical interventions. But the integral or holistic approach claims that every physical event has more than just physical or organic causes; such as the inner state of consciousness, emotions, and moods of an individual, his culture or worldview, and his social structure and environment. In other words, the integral or holistic approach deals with matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit.

However, since everything in this universe is related, or inter-related, to everything else, through inner personal and through outer cosmic energies, it is imperative that our approach to solving all problems, not only in the field of health and well-being but in solving problems in general (industrial, economic, social, political, etc.), be an integral or holistic approach. We need an approach that attempts to understand this cosmic and physical (material) universe of ours in its totality. An approach that also includes and integrates the understanding, the manipulation, and most of all the application of occult (invisible to human eye) personal and cosmic energies that are involved within the process of attaining or realising that which a person is seeking. Such an approach is also more effective, and therefore also more cost-efficient (the process of “thinking,” for example, is a pure occult energetic phenomenon).

MY WORK AND MISSION

I don’t work with motivational techniques; since motivation is only a short-term stimulation. My work is to help bring about “lasting change” that an individual is seeking for attaining integral

health and well-being, and “personal success.” It is based on a scientific and comprehensive theory of the relationship of everything to everything, and within which I take into serious consideration the basic role of various energies that are the fundamental factors in the interrelationship between everything. Especially in the field of medicine and within the process of healing, I don’t treat, or prescribe medication, or give therapies. I explain and I teach what a person can do for attaining her or his own lasting personal success, health and well-being. Mine is a vision that goes beyond the academic and conventional medical practices. In other words, mine is an “integral approach,” based on knowledge and transfer of knowledge.

My work is in the medical, emotional, psychological, and social fields, for individual patients and clients. I also provide consultation, advisory, coaching, and training services to managers and employees of business corporations, industry, trade, and commerce. The main purpose of my involvement with these clients is for helping them attain optimum productivity, quality, cost-efficiency, and economic success, through a robust and integrally healthy work-force. Because, even in the financial and economic world everything is related to everything else, and it is evident that a work-force enjoying an integral state of health and life-satisfaction would enhance economic objectives of the organisation through higher productivity and quality, lower operational costs, and through a significant reduction in the rate of illness and absenteeism.

Finally, my work is my personal mission in life, aimed at helping individuals to stop suffering, and to start “living” and “enjoying” their life in total awareness and consciousness. My work is based on the “teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo”. It is my way of living and applying what They have taught me. However, my work has nothing to do with the transmission of “Spiritual Wisdom,” but has everything to do with helping people attain what they personally “want,” “wish,” “seek,” and “desire.” In other words, to help them attain their personal “self-realisation,” here and now. ❧

A MOMENT ETERNAL

INSTALLING SRI AUROBINDO'S PRESENCE AT THE UNESCO HEADQUARTERS IN PARIS

Maurice Shukla '75 remembers.

I was a witness of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Grace over a very special event — the installation of Sri Aurobindo's statue at the Unesco headquarters in Paris on 16th September 2009. Quite naturally I was deeply moved to be among the four privileged persons selected by Shobha-di to take her composition to Unesco for this occasion. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Government of India, had approached the Ashram for something with which to mark this extraordinarily symbolic event. The Ashram requested Shobha-di to come up with something appropriate.



We got down in earnest to help Shobha-di in whichever way we could. She began with the selection of Sanskrit hymns and mantras that were to accompany her musical composition. Shobha-di's musical composition began emerging gently as she wove around it Vedic hymns, shlokas from the Upanishads and the Gita along with some significant extracts in both English and French from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She had accepted the challenge with such grace and humility that the composition began taking wing. This was the first time that Shobha-di was composing for such a diverse international audience. "Towards a Luminous Future" was her name for this offering and it emerged as a 30-minute composition in her distinctively experimental style of music that sought to transcend the traditional Eastern and Western modes of expression in order to touch a space that was universal and which lovers of music from anywhere could resonate to.

The rehearsals became moments of intense joy and inner and outer dedication as the four of

us, Anurupa, Harinarayan, Joy (from Auroville) and myself, endeavoured to find that inner space of 'oneness' and truth in order to communicate what we had to convey for this exceptional occasion with a happy and effective inner conviction.

As a biographical note on Sri Aurobindo was to be distributed to this diverse audience at Unesco in Paris, Cristof and I put our hearts and heads together to prepare it. The novelty of the task lay in presenting Sri Aurobindo to people who were not disciples or devotees and we were more than happy to take up the challenge. Right from the word 'go' there was that enthusing feeling of joyful service and flawless harmony between all of us and I felt inwardly uplifted as we worked on this very special 'mission' that had been assigned to us in total trust. And at every step Their Grace shone through: the way things organised themselves, the way difficulties were overcome with help and encouragement and understanding from all quarters.

Towards a Luminous Future was a unique achievement on another account: Shobha-di had managed to get Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Vision and Consciousness across so powerfully without mentioning Them even once by name, and thus the 'religious propaganda'-type quicksand had been marvellously side-stepped. I'm sure this was something the Master would have heartily applauded and approved. This universal approach was very important considering the audience it was meant for.

Our rehearsals happened both in the Ashram and Auroville at the Bharat Nivas which again was quite symbolic. Jean, the Auroville sound and light in-charge and one of our former teachers at the SAICE, helped us with the technical arrangements. Then as we were nearing D-day, another miracle occurred. Just as we finished burning the master CD of Shobha-di's music on the evening of 9th September, the entire power system burnt

out in the recording studio! Everything disappeared from the computer except for Shobha-di's musical score that had successfully slipped out onto the master CD!

The biographical Note on Sri Aurobindo and the accompanying Text of the musical composition were printed at our Press and these too turned out beautifully in their conciseness and simple elegance.

As the day of departure for Paris neared, we felt more and more conscious that the Mother had deputed us as Her little ambassadors to Unesco. After all, weren't we taking Sri Aurobindo to the Mother's city of birth! What an enormous privilege and responsibility this was at the same time!

Everything kept unfolding in such amazing fluency and naturalness that Their Presence became more and more tangible and our gratitude for that Presence more and more intense!

In Paris, we were warmly received by our friends and the home we stayed in was big and beautiful and large enough for us to remain anchored in that state of inward receptivity. We were able to practise our 'offering' every day in the most wonderful mood and atmosphere. When we were not rehearsing or sharing with our eager friends about our experience of Ashram life under the love and guidance of the Mother, we went to visit places that were connected with the Mother's life in Paris and around. And on the eve of the programme, I decided to take my team to the basilica of Sacré-Cœur on top of Montmartre. Here, I need to tell you a little story.

One of the Mother's young boys¹ left the Ashram in 1961 to study sports medicine in Germany. After spending some time there, he was so overcome by a bout of home-sickness and longing for the Mother that he sent an SOS to her asking desperately for permission to return to the Ashram. She replied at once, and advised him to go to Sacré-Cœur in Paris. Quite significantly this basilica had opened in 1914, the very year the Mother left Paris for India to meet Sri Aurobindo. On receiving the Mother's letter, he boarded a train for Paris and reached the mount

1. Madhusudan Patel (see previous article).

overlooking the city. As he entered the vicinity of the Sacré-Cœur, all of a sudden he felt enveloped in the Mother's warm physical embrace. That sense of home-sickness that had been eating into his heart magically faded away and in her comforting Presence he regained his old enthusiasm and inner joy. Now this same person had come all the way from Italy to witness the event at Unesco and it was after listening to his reminiscence over lunch one day that I decided we must go to Sacré-Cœur to pay our heartfelt homage to Her on the eve of the programme. Quietly we sat there for some time trying to bring Her into our being in that light happy air. The Sacré-Cœur was once more in that celebratory mode of commemoration of that terrestrially pivotal meeting of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo!

16th September dawned. I woke up feeling exactly as I used to when going to see the Mother in her room, as if I was getting ready for 'Darshan'. In our endeavour to remain in that state of concentration, we unfortunately had to skip the installation-ceremony of Sri Aurobindo's statue and we went straight to the auditorium where the musical offering was to take place.

A very large crowd had gathered in the vast auditorium: Unesco dignitaries, diplomats, intellectuals who did not know much about Sri Aurobindo, writers, artists, simple French friends and admirers of India and a good number of disciples and former students. The lights in the audience dimmed and the spots on the large stage came on. We felt as if our prayerful hearts and bodies were being uplifted in Their Presence as the deeply moving organ-chords of Shobha-di's composition filled the hall and the powerful words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo reverberated in the air. And then as the last notes of Sunil-da's 1972 music faded into a palpable soul-stirred silence, the air felt charged with the fragrance of the New Consciousness that Sri Aurobindo had striven all his life to bring down. For a few minutes at least, we the participants and the hushed spectators in the audience were granted the priceless joy of getting a whiff of that "luminous future".

Infinite gratitude filled our unbelieving hearts. ❧

THE MOTHER'S ARTISTIC TRAINING AT THE ACADEMIE JULIAN

Sunayana '79

The fact that the Mother had a formal training in art gives us a glimpse into her outer human personality. It is not only an important part of her nature but also an important part of her work. She incarnated the Divine and in the physical world Beauty is the form of the Divine.

We have to see the Mother's life in its historic context because the times in which she lived were very different from ours. Her artistic training was done according to the conventions of those times. In the 1870s women in general, even in France, did not have access to education beyond the primary level. Most girls of good families were home-schooled. The Mother too learnt to read

and write at home. But it is interesting to note that her family thought of giving her an artistic training as a part of her higher education. We are not sure who took the initiative. Let us assume that the Mother herself wanted to learn to draw and paint, but it could very likely have been her grandmother who encouraged her. Before going to an art school the Mother first learnt to draw and paint at home with a woman tutor or tutors.

She was 15 years old when she started going to the art school. But in those days a girl of fifteen was an adult. The concept of adolescence as we see it today did not exist. So, it was as if she was choosing a profession for which she was being trained, just as her brother Matteo was being

prepared for higher studies. Mirra Ismalun, the Mother's maternal grandmother was wealthy and lived in the same building complex as her daughter Mathilde Alfassa and her children. She took a deep interest in the children's education and life. In fact, it is quite likely that she may have paid for these art lessons as Maurice Alfassa, the Mother's father, had lost all his money by then. Mirra Ismalun was well-connected to artists and the art circle so she could have guided her in that direction.

The Mother's extended family included uncles and aunts, the Camondos in particular, who were art collectors and who were in close contact with the leading artists of the time, specially the Impressionists. They too may have influenced her in her decision to study art. The art school that she joined had only just started accepting women. An important connection is that this branch of the art school which was only for girls was located at no.8 Rue de Berry, a street very close to where the Mother lived at that time. This may have made it easier for her family to send her there. That building has long been demolished and a new structure stands there.

This art school was called Académie Julian. As the name suggests, it was founded by an artist whose full name was Rodolphe Julian. For many years we in the Ashram had imagined that Académie Julian was an obscure and small art school. The truth is, it was one of the best art schools of its time and at its peak had no less than 11 separate studios in various parts of Paris where students were taught the important principles and techniques of art. By 1880 the Académie Julian had 600 students. Rodolphe Julian himself went to the various studios and taught the courses. He also supervised the work of the teachers whom he had employed and the monitors who carried out the instructions of the teachers.

The period of the Mother's birth and her life in Paris coincides with what is known as the "Belle Époque" (Beautiful Era). It was the time when France was at a height, it had become the centre of artistic and scientific progress in the world. After recovering from recurring battles and political instability the country was enjoying a period



Painting by the Mother which is now in Sri Aurobindo's room.

of peace and tranquillity during which life was becoming more comfortable and enjoyable. The period starts from 1870 and ends with 1914, the year the First World War broke out. This happy period was remembered with great nostalgia because from the time the First World War started the country had to face great difficulties for the next three decades, right through till the end of the Second World War.

During the 19th Century, art in Europe acquired an importance that was unprecedented. People could buy a piece of art and display it in their houses but also the upper class could buy paintings and make a collection, not necessarily displayed anywhere. Art was treated as an investment. It could be sold off and turned into instant cash with the advantage of its having grown in value, in the same way that Indians buy and sell gold. Other than its financial value, art served many other purposes: to record events, to beautify a public place and also to educate. Portrait painting had always existed but in the middle of the 19th century the importance of art went beyond creating beauty. Paintings with moral values or reminding the uneducated masses about the value of truth, faithfulness, courage and other such virtues were commissioned to be displayed in public places.

The role of the artist in French society at that time was almost that of the journalist's today. He informed, entertained, educated, recorded for posterity and inspired the masses. Naturally, he



The Mother with her class at the Académie Julian. She is standing at extreme right, middle row.



Portrait of a friend.

needed to be trained so that he could develop the skills needed for his work. France had established the École des Beaux Arts, the school of fine arts, but it was not so easy to get entry as you had to have some basic skills before starting off on that path.

Mr. Julian saw this as an opportunity when he started a school for aspiring artists. After seeing its success he opened other centres and employed teachers. A few years later he officially founded the Académie Julian, bringing all these instruction-studios under one administration and creating more studios. There were many reasons for the success of his art academy. The Universal Exhibition of Paris, which glorified the scientific and artistic skills of France, had brought the attention of the whole world to the height of achievement that France had reached. Many artists from America and Britain wanted to come to France to learn painting. But the École des Beaux Arts run by the French government taught the courses only in French. Académie Julian, on the other hand, had teachers who taught in English too. So, this became the reason why it attracted foreign students.

Apart from teaching foreign students, the Académie Julian was the first art school to start courses for women. Men and women always had separate classes. Some of the teachers who taught there were also teaching at the Ecole des Beaux Arts so they could prepare the ones who wanted to eventually join the fine art courses run by the government. Moreover, the students of the Académie were eligible for the Prix de Rome which was a scholarship which allowed French students to live and study art in Rome for three to five years.

Although it was very highly regarded by the general public the Académie Julian remained for a long time, true to its name, very academic in its courses. The students learnt the correct way to draw and to paint and to achieve a certain degree of perfection in that. But ironically, the Académie Julian is now famous for having produced a group of artists who were known as “Les Nabis” and who later started an art movement by breaking away from the academic style of painting.

An art movement is formed when a group of artists paint in a particular style for a certain number of years. The art movement that had begun with the Impressionists in France was already fading out when the Mother was born. The Nabis movement was started by a small group of artists who found inspiration from Paul Gauguin. The Mother was not influenced by either the Impressionists or the Nabis. She was completely a product of her training at the Académie and her paintings were indeed very traditional and classical. The few paintings that we have here in the Ashram cannot give us a complete idea of what her other works looked like. However, we can gather how accomplished she was in her execution of a work of art.

In 1893 or 1894 when the Mother started her art study, women who could afford art lessons came from well-to-do families. But while the men went ahead and became full time artists who earned a living from their works we rarely see a woman’s name in the list of famous artists of the times. That is because the women often became portrait artists who painted pictures for the families to keep or illustrators for books, newspapers

and magazines. They also painted still life and interiors but they didn’t compete with the male artists.

The Mother continued her training until the age of 19 after which she married Henri Morisset who had also been a student at the Académie Julian. Although they had both been at the Académie around the same time they had never been in the same studio.

During the first year the students learnt to draw and they started painting only from the second or third year. Life drawing was an important part of the course. Models would sit or stand and the students had to draw and paint them. There are two paintings by the Mother which are in the Ashram collection which were painted during life study classes at the Académie.

From a certain point of view the Mother’s artistic education was useful to her because she must have helped Henri Morisset, her first husband who was an artist, in his work. They are known to have painted a mural in a church together. But from the point of view of the Mother’s personal development her artistic training served a deeper purpose. She has herself said that she never had any ambition of being a great artist. She was very clear that this life as an artist was a means to an end and not the end in itself. It was for the development of the vital being that she learnt the theory and practice of art. The Mother has written that the artist’s discipline is akin to a yogi’s discipline. The artist develops the consciousness of the eyes and the hand. The artist learns to train the eye to observe and the hand to execute.

Academy Julian is now mainly known as the place which produced the artists who started a new art movement – Les Nabis. To come back to the Nabis, let us see what inspired them to create something new. The Nabis movement broke away from the great desire for expressing everything in three dimensional pictures with the help of techniques that created the illusion of depth and perspective. They brought back the idea of the flat picture.

This group was made up of primarily five or six artists: Paul Serusier, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Maurice Denis, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Paul Ranson and Felix Vallotton. The artists remained as a group for a decade from 1888 but the influence of the Nabis continued and ended only in 1910. So this movement can be said to have existed for about two decades.

The group was deeply influenced by Paul Gauguin, with his linear graphic technique and very personal philosophy. He in turn, in common with Vincent Van Gogh, acquired some of his stylistic approach from the wave of “Japonisme” that swept over France beginning in the middle of the 19th century. During this time many features of style and design were influenced by a new awareness of the art of the Far East. The Buddhist art of the French colonies in South East Asia was beginning to catch the imagination of the Europeans. The Japanese techniques, such as doing away with the use of perspective and using dark outlines, was called “Japonisme”. The Nabis were definitely influenced by the Orient, not only in their art but also in their philosophy of life.



Painting by the Mother, done in Japan

Nothing happens in a void, there is always a social context. It was the high point of the Industrial Revolution. The group of friends, who began to work together, felt that the age of the machine was turning human beings into automatons and taking away their souls. They felt that art should

have a spiritual purpose in the world and it should uplift the common man from his ordinary life. So, apart from painting symbolic pictures that could inspire the common man towards a higher life, they also began to bring beauty into the everyday life of the masses. They created posters, illustrated books, designed wall papers and painted pictures in public places, designed props and costumes for theatres and made designs on ceramics and textiles, on objects of daily use.

The word “Nabi” means “prophet” in Hebrew and Arabic. These men felt that they were at the beginning of a new movement, that they were the harbingers of a new art. They were so focussed on the spiritual aspect of their work that they had a mantra which they recited when they had their weekly gatherings. They used to hold hands and recite the following words, “Sounds, colours and words have a miraculously expressive power beyond all representation... and even beyond the

literal meaning of the word...”. This just shows us how the whole atmosphere was open to a spiritual awakening in Europe, as a reaction to industrial progress.

The Nabi movement came after the Impressionists and just before the movement of Art Nouveau. This was around the time when advertising was coming into existence. What we know today as commercial art and design was started by them. From this point onwards the quest for beauty came into the daily lives of the people. The Nabi group were the ones who connected the fine arts to the decorative arts. So, indeed, in a certain way they were prophets because they showed the way to the future, a new way of living.

The Nabis wanted to bring down their high aesthetics into everything that surrounded them, including the objects of everyday use. This same idea had already been in the minds of artists in Great Britain, among the group known as “the



Painting showing the artists who were part of the “Nabis” group.

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood”. Already these British artists had begun an art movement known as the “Arts and Crafts Movement”. This movement started in 1850, much before the Nabis came together. The important point is that these two movements happened around the same era and both were connected to the Industrial Revolution which had made it possible for man to live a more fruitful and comfortable life, and go one step further in his evolution. But the Nabis were not influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They developed independently.

The Pre-Raphaelites believed that essentially art was spiritual in character. Their aim was to bring people back to nature. They wanted to revive the medieval spirit of virtue and valour. Before Raphael’s time art was more stylised and less personal. So they revived the crafts and gave a lot of importance to design and decorative arts. They signed their work with the initials PRB after their names. It was the identity of the group and its philosophy that mattered, not so much the individual.

William Morris, the main person behind this movement, made an important contribution to European society by starting the Arts and Crafts Movement. He believed that art should uplift the life of the ordinary man. It wasn’t only an idea in his head; he actually set up a factory to produce these everyday objects. Even today the Victoria and Albert Museum has the original designs that he created for wallpapers.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was very much a part of Victorian England. It had a strong leaning towards ideals and they chose subjects such as the Arthurian legends or the life of Christ. But they also had a desire for social reforms. There was a need to go back to nature as the machines of the Industrial Era were drawing people away from the villages and there was a sense that machines could become more powerful than human beings. The artists were not artisans any more. They were part of the intellectual life of the country and formed the elite of society. The PRB felt it was their responsibility to educate the masses and guide them. In this they resemble the Nabis. But

while the PRB were looking backwards for their inspiration the Nabis were looking at the future.

This was that important point when beauty came down into objects of everyday use and art became less and less “beautiful”. This is where we see the transition, when France went from the Impressionists and the Art Nouveau movement to the paintings of Picasso. The seekers of aesthetics were the designers. The artist became the philosopher. The average man developed an aesthetic sense and could surround himself with beauty.

This is also where we come back to the story of the Académie Julian. As art and artists changed, the Académie slowly began to lose its relevance. In 1959 the Académie Julian joined with another art school started by the ceramist Guillaume Met de Penninghen. In 1968 the two separate schools merged and became one. In the very same place where the Académie Julian used to be on Rue de Dragon there is now the art school which is known as Ecole Supérieur d’Arts Graphiques (ESAG) Penninghen. This school now prepares students for the higher schools of art, for courses in decorative arts, graphic art and design. As a reminder that this is indeed the new avatar of the old Académie they have kept the old sign over their doorway.

The Mother painted in this milieu where artists were actually the movers of ideas. Although she didn’t paint in the style of the Nabis or of the other symbolists, their ideas were in the air. She left the art circle at the age of 30 around 1909 when she started living alone. But it is important to note that it was also the end of the Nabi movement. The next art phase in France had already taken off. That was Art Nouveau. It is interesting to note that this was the point in history when Fine Art merged with Decorative Art and graphics and design, bringing beauty into the common man’s material surroundings. This was one of the ways in which a higher power was brought down into the consciousness of the ordinary man. It was a way of making our mortal world more perfect, and in this respect it was very much in the lines of the spiritual goal towards which the Mother would later guide humanity. ☸

PERSEUS THE DELIVERER

Sunayana' 79 reviews the programme of the 1st of December 2015

Perseus the Deliverer is the only play written by Sri Aurobindo which has been performed at least 6 times in the Ashram. Most of the other plays have been performed only twice or thrice at the most. This is a sign of how popular it is. Perhaps it is so well-loved because it is the most dramatic of all Sri Aurobindo's plays.



The performance on 1st December 2015 was probably the 6th time that it was being presented but sadly it left much to be desired. However, there was something unique this time round. Never before has a performance of the 1st December programme seemed so close to current events of the world. In a situation that is an irony wrapped in an irony, this play written by Sri Aurobindo is set in Syria! Although he specifies that this is a Syria of romance and not of history and that it has nothing to do with the real Syria, home to a country of Semitic people, the name has now acquired a great importance in our present times. Sri Aurobindo clarifies in a foreword that the people in the play are of a Hellenistic culture. Until now nobody had bothered to check where this country was on the map of the world.

But today we can't check the news in any form without seeing the name of Syria and the utter horror it has unleashed on the world at large. And suddenly this play becomes so topical.

The fact that the play speaks of bringing an end to the bloodthirsty mentality of the fanatics holding on to an old form of worship, was highlighted in the programme distributed before the show as well as in the introduction read out at the beginning of the performance. For the first time the words that the protagonists were saying had a ring that connected it to the present and entire dialogues seemed to be written for today's world situation. For the first time perhaps the students are so politically conscious too that they knew the relevance of that performance.

A point to note is that the last time Perseus was performed it was in 1993, for the 50th anniversary of the School. In 2015 it was the first time that it was being performed since then, 22 years later. So there was a certain amount of expectation that had built up. As usual the cast for this performance was mostly made up of the older students of the School, mostly from Knowledge, and as usual Cristof had been asked to help with directing the actors. As usual again, the rehearsals began after Knowledge programme was over. And here credit must be given to the students that they could get a three-hour play ready in three weeks. But as the entire cast was made up of students and not Ashramites they could rehearse all day and all evening without worrying about missing out anything in their work life.

Even though several actors and actresses performed very well, I felt the costumes were a let-down. While Perseus looked like he had walked off a fashion ramp in Milan, Andromeda was dressed for a party in London in her short red dress and the queen was all set for a red-carpet event in Cannes in her off-shoulder red gown which was short from the front and long at the back. All this made it totally confusing because

the old King and the mob were clothed in the costumes of the period while everybody else looked much too contemporary. Fortunately Athene's costume was beautiful and gave a touch of credibility when she appeared on stage.

I can imagine the young men protesting and saying that they didn't want to wear short tunics which looked like women's dresses. In that case they could have set the entire play in modern Syria with everyone dressed in a contemporary style. Every time the young man playing Perseus stood with his back to the audience we could actually see the battery of his wireless microphone so casually poking out of his trousers pocket. Clearly, there was no one coordinating the costumes and all the actors were perhaps told to dress up as they pleased. The end result was that the costumes were distracting and took away from the focus of the play.

Also a bit incomprehensible was the no-make-up look. Neither the princess nor the queen had any make-up on their eyes and lips nor did they have any jewellery on their body. No care had been given to the hairstyles. Visually, the servant girl and the princess looked the same. Considering that our theatre is so big, those who sit at the



back find it hard to see the facial expressions if the eyes are not highlighted. When so much work had gone into the acting why did they not put a little effort into how the actors looked?

Like the past few years, the set design was striking. The temple of Poseidon was very effectively

although simple, looked convincing too.

Every time this play has been performed the actor playing the role of Polydaon, the evil priest, has been more impressive than the actor playing the hero Perseus. Perhaps his lines are more powerful than those written for Perseus. People tend to forget who played Perseus but every-

one seems to remember who played Polydaon. (And may I take this opportunity to say that the Mother has never told anybody that if they play the role of Polydaon they will become evil like him.) This year Shubham Desai in the role of the evil priest gave a memorable performance. Even though it rained through the entire show – the readers will remember that this year we had unprecedented rains and flooding – every word of Shubham's dialogues was clearly heard, partly thanks to the cordless microphones and partly because of his clear diction.

On the whole though, I was left disappointed with the 2015 performance. It is a well-known fact that things always fall in place on the final day and everyone feels the Mother's Grace acting to make everything smooth and beautiful. Perhaps we have taxed the Divine Grace too much. It's time to sit up and take responsibility. If actors are miscast and parents are allowed to interfere with costumes then the 1st December annual stage performance will start looking like the Knowledge programme.

I write this review with a tinge of emotion. I had the great privilege of playing Andromeda in 1993 and it was with an article on my experience of acting in that play that I began writing for *The Golden Chain* magazine. ❧



WORKING TOGETHER IN AUROVILLE

Ashramites, Aurovilians and SAICE Alumni came together on 28th February, 2016, to celebrate Auroville's 48th birthday by joining hands and working together. Sourcing Our Oneness (a joint initiative between Auroville and Ashram-related organizations) organized a morning of collective work in the Bharat Nivas Compound led by The Golden Chain Fraternity and the Bharat Nivas Group.

About 80 participants gathered at Bharat Nivas in Auroville at 7 am. After tea and biscuits and a brief introduction the participants were divided into smaller groups. Each group then went off to its assigned area in the compound led by a group leader from the Sourcing our Oneness team. The next one and a half to two hours

were spent cleaning and beautifying the assigned areas. Many of the participants then went round the entire Bharat Nivas compound stopping to see the work done by each group. It



was past 9:30 by the time all settled down for a well-deserved breakfast.

After breakfast everyone gathered for an informal interaction. Aster-di shared her thoughts on Bharat Nivas emphasizing that it was the only project in Auroville other than Matrimandir which was started by the Mother herself. Some of the participants expressed their joy at coming together to work, to put in physical effort and to "perspire together". The possibility of greater interaction between the communities was also discussed. The session finally ended at about



11am with the feeling that we would certainly be coming together again to work. ❧

Note: To join the Golden Chain group which goes



twice a month to the Matrimandir Gardens to work there, register your name at the GC office.



REMEMBERING IRA-DI

Sunayana '79

It is hard to believe that Ira-di is no more. To an older generation Ira-di is synonymous with childhood in the Ashram. For almost 50 years she looked after the youngest children of the School and was like a mother to so many of us.



Ira-di was related to Anilbaran Roy and it was through him that, together with all her brothers and sisters, she came to the Ashram in the 1940s. As their parents were still living in Bengal she looked after her siblings because she was the eldest. While she was a student she learnt to dance from Anu-ben and participated in many programmes. She learnt to sing from Sahana-di and other music teachers of the time. She attended the classes of the Mother.

Even before she finished her studies she had told the Mother that she wanted to work in a "boarding", (a hostel for children). When she finished her studies she was asked to help Kiran-di, an elderly Bengali lady, who was in charge of a boarding known as "Millie's Home". There she did the kind of

work that Kiran-di could not do, such as taking and fetching children from the School and the Playground. She also helped Kiran-di with the cooking as children used to eat in the boardings in those days. This was in a way a training for her because a few years after that she was asked to take charge of a new boarding.

This new boarding was given the name "Ira's Home" by the Mother and she had three others to assist her: Brajkishore-da, Kavita-di and Aruna. In those days boys and girls lived in the same boarding so she had a mixed batch of very young boys and girls. The first batch of children who came to live with her had all been newly admitted to the School that year and were mostly Bengali. It was a time when large numbers of children, coming from various parts of India, were being admitted to the school and new boardings were being opened every year.

The great advantage for the children was that Ira-di was a singer and a dancer. The uniqueness of Ira-di's boarding was that she taught the children to sing and dance, because for her, music



and dance were as essential as reading and writing. Children would get up in the morning and get ready but before having breakfast they would learn to sing. Having sung a few songs the children would go off to Corner House for breakfast and then to school. In the same way, before dinner there would be a dance session. Then everyone would walk down to Corner House for dinner. Homework was done in the afternoons and in those days homework was discouraged in the School so it never took more than an afternoon or two in the week.

In the very first years when she was given the charge of the boarding she used to present a small performance of songs and dances for Nolini-da's birthday on 13th January. So, the whole month preceding it was filled with rehearsals and costume preparations. Ira-di would choose poems from Kobi Nishikanto, Dilip Kumar Roy, Dwijendralal Roy or other Ashram-connected poets and then choreograph dances to them. There was no question of recording songs in those days, in the mid-sixties, so Ira-di used to sing the songs herself during the rehearsals, instead of playing them on a cassette-player. Closer to the day of the presentation the other singers of the Ashram would come and sing with musical accompaniment. One can imagine Nolini-da's joy at being present at those cultural programmes with which his birthday was celebrated.

After a few years the performance for Nolini-da's birthday stopped and the songs and dances were prepared for the Bengali New Year in mid-April and again later in the year. This was perhaps her greatest contribution to our growing up years. We all became



IRA

Arati Das Gupta

Qui dit qu'elle n'est pas là, notre Ira? Je la vois avec un sourire bienveillant et très amical, toujours entourée par des enfants qui l'adorent et l'aiment. Dans ses relations avec les autres, même dans ses activités quotidiennes, il y a une harmonie totale, une qualité exceptionnelle et bien rare. Je l'entends chanter, je la vois monter des pièces sur la scène, toujours très originales et très touchantes.

Dernièrement quand elle était au Nursing Home elle a chanté des airs pour moi au téléphone.

Je sais que maintenant Douce Mère la serre étroitement sur Sa Poitrine, et notre Ira y trouve un repos très paisible et tendre, béatifique et silencieux – un repos bien mérité!

Who says she is no more, our Ira? I see her always smiling graciously and in a friendly manner, surrounded always by children who adore her and love her.

In her dealings with others, even in her daily activities, there is a total harmony – a quality most exceptional and rare.

I see her staging plays so original and touching.

And lately when Ira was in our Nursing Home she sang for me over the telephone.

I know our Divine Mother embraces her very tenderly and keeps her close to Her bosom; and Ira finds there a refuge most peaceful and tranquil, a refuge beatific, a refuge well deserved by her.

familiar with the words of these wonderful poets. Ira-di was particularly close to Kobi Nishikanto and she taught the children many of his poems in the form of songs after they had been set to music, mostly by Tinkori-da. In fact, Nishikanto used to come to the boarding to see the rehearsals. The high and beautiful thoughts of his poetry were a part of our everyday life.

For the first few years the food for the children came from the Dining Room and Ira-di had to cook some additional dishes for the children. But from 1968, after Corner House was opened for the children who were living in the boardings, Ira-di cooked only when it was someone's birthday. In the evenings, on the days when we did not go for the meditation in the Playground, Ira-di used to read to us from her enormous volume of *Ramayan* written in Bengali. We sat on our wide balcony, all of us around her, and listened to her. Very often we fell asleep on that balcony and she would then lift us up and carry us to our beds at the end.

Strange as it may sound, Ira-di was also a coach for wrestling. This is the uniqueness of the Mother's vision. She wanted her children to develop multiple skills. The same lady who had taught us the delicate movements of dance in the morning was teaching us the different positions of pinning our opponent down in a wrestling pit in the late afternoon. On Sunday mornings and very often on weekdays in summer, the children of the boarding would be up before 6 o'clock in the morning, would rub mustard oil on their arms and legs, then walk down to the Tennis Ground, which was just a few

steps away from the boarding, and practise wrestling on the sea-sand. Then we would have a dip in the sea, come back and have a wash and go for breakfast and then to school.

For twenty years Ira-di looked after both boys and girls but for the next thirty years she was given the charge of only girls and that too the ones who were still in the Primary section. The boarding moved to another house, closer to the Ashram. As age was catching up with her she could not be as active as before.

All those who had ever lived in her care will remember her love and warmth, the way she made our childhood days memorable with songs, music, stories, sea-swimming, walking to the Ashram Theatre to watch cultural programmes and going to the Playground meditation every Sunday and Thursday evening. Invariably one or two children would fall asleep and she and



Bradjishore-da would carry them back to the boarding. For many she was the one who initiated them to performing on a stage before an audience, for others she will be remembered as the one who taught them to wrestle. But everyone remembers her for her gentleness and the sweet smile which was always on her lips. ❧

50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF IRA-DI'S BOARDING

19th December 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of Ira's Home. The idea of holding a cultural programme came only two weeks before this date. Organised in a hurry, this commemoration was put together in ten days. We had recitations of poems, dances choreo-

every day. So all that we presented reflected our way of life of those days.

Kavita-di had chosen a few songs which Ira-di had taught to her adult students as well as some poems which had been popular in those days. The current boarders sang the songs they had learnt. At first we wanted to sing one of our favourite songs in a chorus but we soon realised that we had too little time to rehearse and all of us were out of practice. However we were very keen to at least hear it, so we requested Debjani, one of the teachers of the music section, to sing it.



Anjan

As Ira-di taught us dancing, there were two dances. Anurekha choreographed movements to go with Sri Aurobindo's "Invitation" and "A Tree". One of the high points of the programme was Anurekha's dance interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's poem "Who".

Shyama, one of the older boarders, recounted her experience of living in Ira-di's boarding and brought back to life those wonderful days. The programme ended with Anjan's recitation of his own poem, written in the same vein as Sukumar Ray's comic poems. He also enacted parts of it as he recited the poem.

It was wonderful to be together again with our old friends, some of whom we had not seen in years. And though organised in a hurry, the programme was appreciated by young and old. ❧



Reciting the prayer

graphed to poems, songs and a prayer. There were still quite a few people from the first batch with which Ira-di's boarding started – Anjan, Maitreyi, Anurekha – to take part in this cultural programme.



Anurekha

As 19th December was a Saturday we thought that a Saturday programme was the most appropriate format for us. The various items were connected with a commentary by Sunayana. She began with a short introduction. The programme started with a prayer given by the Mother for Ira's Home on its first anniversary: "Douce Mère, nous voulons être sincères en dépit de toutes les opinions contraires. La sincérité est notre sauvegarde."

One of the unique features of Ira-di's boarding was the way we were taught to sing and dance



The children who are now in the boarding



EYE CAMPS FOR ASHRAM WORKERS

In partnership with Aravind Eye Hospital and the NGO, Sharana, The Golden Chain Fraternity organised and funded two eye camps in March. The first, held on March 13th, was for the benefit of people from villages in the Lake Estate area, many of whom work on Ashram lands. Over two hundred and sixty of them got their eyes checked. Spectacles were provided at discount to 118 individuals and a number of others were booked for cataract surgery. The wonderful arrangements made by Pradeep Lall of Lake Estate, including providing transport for the villagers, meant that everything went off without a hitch.

On 27th March another eye camp was organised for the workers of the Ashram departments. Over two hundred and forty workers got their eyes checked. Over a hundred and twenty of them were provided spectacles at a reduced rate and arrangements were made for six to have cataract surgery. Many former student volunteers were present at this camp ensuring its smooth functioning.

With the help of Aravind Eye Hospital which has perfected the system of conducting such camps and Sharana which also has experience in the field, The Golden Chain Fraternity has been able to provide Ashram-related communities a useful service. ❀

QUIZ TIME!

Know the answers to the following questions? They will be printed in our next issue.

1. The Mother studied the text of the Dhammapada in its French translation with her class of young students and her explanations were later published. Whose translation was it?
2. For many years the Mother used to give special blessings on puja days, such as Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja etc. In which year did she stop this practice?
3. Who used to make the Mother's sandals?
4. Where did all the sadhaks and sadhikas eat before the Dining Room was created?
5. There is a flower to which the Mother has given the spiritual name of "Common Sense". What is its botanical name?

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE NOV 2015 ISSUE

1. *Who did Sri Aurobindo engage as a tutor when he wanted to learn Bengali after he came back from England?*
Dinendra Kumar Roy.
2. *Where did Sri Aurobindo go and live when he was released from prison?*
After his release from prison Sri Aurobindo went to live in the house of his maternal aunt, his mother's younger sister, and her husband (Krishna Kumar Mitra).
3. *She was given her name by Sri Aurobindo when she was a child. She has been a teacher in the school for decades. Who is she?*
Gauri Pinto.
4. *Who was the famous lady from the early days of the Ashram who wrote to Sri Aurobindo that she was going to kill herself and received the reply : "If you are not there anymore who will make luchis for me?"*
Mridu-di. Her full name was Mridubhashini but she was known to be a very quarrelsome woman. She died peacefully, even though she was in good health, soon after Sri Aurobindo left his body. The Mother is reported to have said that Mridu-di felt that she had no reason to live anymore and so her soul chose to go away.
5. *What is the spiritual significance of the honeysuckle flowers?*
"Constant Remembrance of the Divine".

*If you can always smile at life,
life also will always smile at you.*

The Mother



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*Our human consciousness has windows that open on the Infinite but
generally men keep these windows carefully shut. They have to be opened
wide and allow the Infinite freely to enter into us and transform us.*

The Mother

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Beauty that the Divine
expresses himself.

The Mother

