

Poetizing SPIRIT

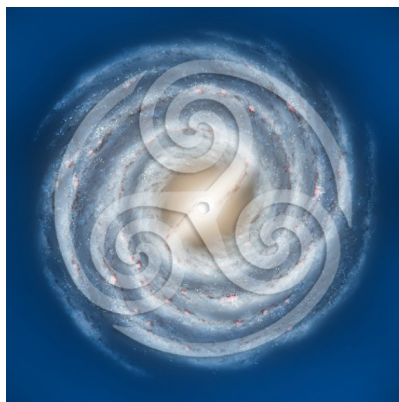


Essays, Poems, and Illustrations

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Rod Hemsell

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A
150th
Birth Anniversary Tribute
to
Sri Aurobindo

“The Supreme’s gaze looked out through human eyes”

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ON SYMBOLISM IN THE TEACHINGS OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

1

The Meaning of Symbols

First we should ask ourselves how we think about symbolism. Does it seem to have much importance to us, either theoretically or practically? Are we aware of its prominent role in our use of language? What are the symbols with which we are most familiar and how do they affect us?

We can easily reflect on the practical aspect of familiar symbols such as traffic signs and the many commercial images that influence our behavior, such as product logos like “Apple” and “Toyota” and the Big Yellow M. All of us also probably respond in similar stereotypical ways to graphic designs like the Swastika, the Hammer and Sickle, the Star of David, and the Christian Cross. The similarity of all of these examples is that they are visual images associated with institutions that have had a certain degree of power over the lives of people and societies within the scope of recent history and to which we have all been exposed. Therefore we have some idea of their meaning. The simple formula that can be assigned to the relationship between the symbols and their meaning is $A=B$, or A represents B. The Big Yellow M represents the McDonald's corporation, the Star of David represents Judaism, and so on. But what the symbol tells us about the thing it represents is basically nothing. We are able to associate the two because of direct experience or training and conditioning. If we eat lots of fast food we will surely know about the Big Yellow M, and if we are members of the Christian religion and have been reasonably well indoctrinated by it, the Cross will mean something more or less specific to us. Otherwise such symbols may simply represent an institution whose existence we are vaguely aware of but whose

meaning we don't really know much about. The Auroville symbol may mean a lot to some of us while to many people it will have no meaning at all.

On a deeper level, symbolism is a common technique or device used in novels and movies to represent things we especially value or fear, or which have a strong appeal to our feelings about ourselves and the world, such as Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, who represents hope in a future of justice and freedom, or the “ring” in *The Lord of the Rings*, which represents the hidden aspects of our nature which may either save us or cause us to fall. We can interpret many science fiction movies and novels as representing either a glorified view of technological civilization or a dystopian view of its inherent dangers and possibly disastrous consequences. Such symbolic representations can profoundly influence the emotions and ideas of people and society. For example, the mendacious behavior of the 45th American President with which the media bombards us every day must affect the morale of society in ways that are likely to be destructive of our faith in government and our way of life. It seems that in fact our values and freedoms are being stolen from us under the noses of our elected officials, with at least their tacit consent. (Unfortunately, this situation is not unique to either this country or this moment in history – ca. 2020, of course.) Whether or not this is the political reality, the construction is elevated to the status of a symbolic image that is constantly projected in various forms by the media – journalistic commentaries, comedy shows, dramas, and academic theses. It's like Sita in her protective circle when the golden deer attracts her interest. Rama goes after it for her and instructs his brother, loyal Lakshman, to stay by her side. Hearing the evil magician, Maricha's, simulated calls of distress, however, Sita in fear persuades Lakshman to go to Rama's aid, thus failing in his commitment to be her vigilant guard, and allowing the demon, Ravana, through the ruse of his magician's skillful fakery, to abduct the culture's symbolic soul of purity, Sita. The dharma of the most righteous and noble representatives of society, its leaders and role

models, is undermined by human weakness and evil intent. It's one of my favorite symbolic tales from India. Each of us harbors all of these characters, psychologically, in ourselves, including the hero Rama who ultimately musters his army of vital forces to rectify the situation. That's the truth of the symbol.

Symbols, therefore, are things that we commonly use to represent other things, but there may be little or no similarity or necessity in the relationship between the symbol and the thing it represents. We could see it every day and it might never tell us anything about what it means. And it is possible for the same symbol to mean entirely different things to different people. The association between the two sides of the equivalence depends upon our education, experience, cultural exposure, – the conditioning that creates understanding in some form. In fact, the whole idea of symbolism is based on the way in which we humans are conditioned by culture, and especially by the way in which language is used to convey conventionally understood meanings. And here we can raise important questions concerning the relationship between language and meaning, symbols and truth. For example, how can something, as different as a symbolic image or word can be from the thing it represents, actually convey the thing it represents to our understanding? We may say that this is just how language works, or that learning is a product of repetition whereby we establish mental and emotional associations between symbolic images and things. Some philosophers, such as David Hume in the 17th century, have proposed that our sensations and perceptions are turned into ideas by the mind, by some mysterious mechanism of cause and effect that we cannot actually see or understand, but which nevertheless produces a one-to-one relationship between image and reality. And what is more, the whole evolutionary continuum from molecules to mind is believed to be the product of such a mechanical yet invisible process, including the human brain, thought, and language, in the empirical view. In fact this is a popular view held by neuroscience today, which it strives very tenaciously to prove. But actually none of these answers really explains the mysterious process of language

and consciousness with which we are constantly engaged. Just about everything we know, as far as language is concerned, is a symbolic representation of some other reality, and we simply accept that there is this close relationship, or identity, between the symbol and what it means, because most of the time it works pretty well for us.

Reflecting on these aspects of language has led many philosophers and scientists to conclude that all knowledge is representational and consists only of certain frameworks of understanding that are constructed by the mind and conventionally agreed upon. Language is the primary tool that we use to systematize such conventional ways of understanding things. But the skeptical tendency that is predominant in such schools of thought also easily leads to the conclusion that we actually know very little about things themselves. What we really know are our constructed frameworks. The extent to which our symbols and systems of symbols correspond to and correctly represent the world of our experience, according to this constructivist theory of knowledge and language, depends entirely on the efforts of talented people to verify, or prove, the adequacy or inadequacy of the correspondence between the representation and the reality. But in any case such theories generally agree that there will always be a distance, or gap, or an essential difference between our knowledge and reality, just as there is between the symbol and what it represents. And such a conclusion commonly leads to doubt regarding the possibility of knowing the real truth of things, or that there are any realities to be known; perhaps there are only many different points of view.

There is another approach to the question of meaning, however, which asks: How is it that language and consciousness can even know and represent reality in the first place? In fact, human beings have been using language to symbolize and communicate about reality for thousands of years quite successfully. We are perfectly conscious of the cup and vase on the table, and when we name them we are naming real things. We are not merely expressing a

representation of something that might not exist, or something imaginary that exists only as a symbol, as if in a dream or on a screen. When we accept that this is what is actually happening, we can then embark on another theory of language and meaning which has also been widespread among philosophers and psychologists for many centuries, and for which Heidegger is especially well-known, along with Whitehead, going very far back in history to Hegel, Thomas Aquinas and the Christian Scholastics, and to Plato and Aristotle. This approach to the problem of language and meaning is known generally as Idealism, which, to put it simply, believes that consciousness is a field of universal ideas and particular things, both of which are real. Everything that is known and represented by consciousness is a combination of universal qualities and more or less tangible, concrete things. Individuals and their inter-relationships are actual representations or expressions of universal realities. We know their forms, and we give them names: the cup and vase on the table and the flower in the vase are actual things that are manifestations of universal forms: cup, vase, flower. Our awareness of these things and the language we use to symbolize them emerge from the same field of consciousness as do the things themselves; the former is a representation, or phenomenon, on the mental plane, and the latter is a phenomenon, or representation, on the physical plane. And there is a life plane in-between that energizes them both. We exist in a world where complex processes of consciousness and force produce cups and vases and flowers and also the awareness and language by which such things are known and expressed, by insects and by human beings; everything is an embodiment of some combination of ideal forms and the knowable something that they are. And it is not only language that symbolizes things, but things themselves are the symbols of the universal forms that they embody and express. The cup on the table is an actual individual expression of the thing that is named, whose meaning and purpose is its existence as a cup, or a vase, or a flower. Nature is in fact this world of constantly emerging, interacting, and self-reflecting forms and meanings. The mystery of their relationship is what Heidegger called “the unity of things that are different.”

In this theory of language and meaning, the actual object we perceive and name is the symbol of a universal reality that is known innately by consciousness, and the meaning of that reality is expressed by the thing itself, as well as by thought and language. The linguistic symbol may actually be closer to the reality than the material object, in a way, because the ideal is the reality of the thing, and it is known by consciousness in a subtler and vaster view of the possible and actual forms that it creates, as well as their relational contexts. But in another way they are the same thing on different planes of that reality: the actual individuals and their ideal forms. In Sanskrit and the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, the reality of something that is known, and expressed by its actual existence, is called its *swabhava*, or essential nature. So now, let us turn to Sri Aurobindo's theory of Vedic knowledge and symbolism, where we may find a further elaboration and reinforcement of this idealistic theory of language and meaning, raised to a higher level of intensity that may help us answer these questions with greater clarity.

2

Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Vedic Symbolism

An exploration of symbolism in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother reveals how symbolic consciousness works in very concrete ways that we can experience and understand, while at the same time we are being guided by it into a deeper relationship with their teachings and their Yoga of Transformation, which is precisely its purpose. And the best way to begin such an exploration is through a study of Sri Aurobindo's approach to translating and interpreting Vedic symbolism, which he has described in detail in *The Secret of the Veda*¹.

In this work Sri Aurobindo develops a very thorough and elaborate theory of interpretation and translation of the Rg Veda

1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, <https://www.sriurobindoashram.org/sriurobindo/writings.php>.

which effectively forms the basis of his philosophy and Yoga. The first and foremost example of this is in his treatment of the Vedic god Agni with which the Veda begins and to whom many of its hymns are dedicated. This god, according to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation, is a symbolic representation of the divine will in mortals. While Agni was traditionally thought of as the symbol of sacrificial fire, Sri Aurobindo finds that many things are attributed to Agni throughout the Veda which could not be associated with physical fire and ritual sacrifice. According to his reading of the Sanskrit, the traditional authorities, such as Sayana in the 14th century, did not manage to produce a reliable account of the meaning of either the language or the symbolism employed by the ancient Rishis of the Veda. And the many avid attempts to do so in the 19th century in Europe didn't fare any better. An example with which he begins the demonstration of his theory, which is both linguistically and psychologically more coherent and consistent than others, is taken from the first hymn to Agni which says: *Agnir hota kavikrutah, satyas citrasravastamaha; devo debehir a gamat.*

Even if we don't know Sanskrit, if we have read Sri Aurobindo's work somewhat extensively we might recognize many of the words in this verse, such as fire, priest, seer, force, mind, truth, inspired hearing, and finally "come, a god with the gods". At any rate, Sri Aurobindo translates the verse in a variety of ways and discusses the terminology that it uses in order to demonstrate the basis of his theory. For example, "Agni, the priest, whose work/action is that of the seer"; "Agni the priest, active in the rite, who is true"; "Agni, priest of the offering whose will towards action is that of the seer, most rich in varied inspiration". And then he states his argument, systematically, repeatedly, and persuasively, as we shall see in these selections from *The Secret of the Veda*:

"Who, then, is this god Agni to whom language of so mystic a fervour is addressed, to whom functions so vast and profound are ascribed? ...It is not a sacrificial fire that is capable of these functions, nor can it be any material flame or principle of physical

heat and light. ...Psychologically, then, we may take Agni to be the divine will perfectly inspired by divine wisdom, and indeed one with it, which is the active or effective power of the Truth-consciousness. ...Agni is *satya*, true in his being; perfect possession of his own truth and the essential truth of things gives him the power to apply it perfectly in all act and movement of force. ...Moreover, he is *citrasravastavah*; from the Ritam (*vast law of Right in the cosmos*) there proceeds a fullness of richly luminous and varied inspirations which give the capacity for doing the perfect work. For all these are epithets of Agni as the *hotr*, the priest of the sacrifice, he who performs the offering. ...We see, then, in what capacity Agni is called to the sacrifice. "Let him come, a god with the gods" ...For in the external sense of the Veda the gods are universal powers of physical nature personified; in any inner sense they must be universal powers of Nature in her subjective activities, Will, Mind, etc. ...Thus the Ribhus (*a family of seers and priests*) who were at first human beings or represented human faculties, became divine and immortal powers by perfection in the work. ...It is a continual self-offering of the human to the divine and a continual descent of the divine into the human which seems to be symbolized in the sacrifice" (p. 65-67).

In these first few pages of his commentary on the hymn, Sri Aurobindo introduces several key terms associated with Agni which he finds recurring throughout the hundreds of hymns that he will translate and that he will use as reference points throughout many of his writings on Yoga Philosophy. For example, in this verse he highlights the term *sravas* which has the root associated with *sruti* or inspired truth-hearing, which, along with *drsti* and *viveka*, he will often mention in his writing as essential powers of consciousness to be developed through Yoga. From here on for two hundred pages in this volume, and then for another four hundred pages in the next volume on Vedic symbolism, he will continue to provide examples of his psychological theory of interpretation which he applies in his translations of more than 80 hymns and a thousand verses. And he will assign many more specific

psychological meanings and supramental processes and powers of consciousness to a plethora of other Vedic deities: Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Vayu, Vishnu, Sarama, Savitri, Saraswati, Brihaspati, Illa, Usha, Soma, etc, etc. Each of these gods and goddesses becomes the symbolic representative of a power or function of the processes of spiritual transformation which are brought to consciousness in us through their mantric invocations. And yet, it is only through these inspired commentaries and translations by the Master Yogi that such meanings could possibly be known by us, or that we could access the rhythmic speech through which we are enabled to become directly cognizant of their power. Through the mediation of Sri Aurobindo's commentaries and translations we discover that the many Vedic images of nature, such as rays, brightnesses, waters, rivers, oceans, cows, horses, wine and riches actually represent, and present to us in all their dynamic and revelatory meanings, the truths of consciousness and cosmic existence that are revealed to the supramental vision. We are initiated by hearing into the vision of the realities that the gods represent.

I would like to quote a few passages that I think will illustrate quite fully and dramatically the nature of the symbolic significances that Sri Aurobindo assigns to the various Vedic gods and images, which constitute the basis of his psychological and spiritual interpretation of the Veda. In the next few chapters of the book, for example, we learn these equivalences:

“In Sanskrit the root *dakṣ* means to hurt, kill and also to be competent, able, the adjective *dakṣa* means clever, skillful, competent, fit, careful, attentive; *dakṣiṇa* means clever, skillful, right-hand, like *dexios*, and the noun *dakṣa* means, besides strength and also wickedness from the sense of hurting, mental ability or fitness like other words of the family. We may compare also the word *dasā* in the sense of mind, understanding. All this evidence taken together seems to indicate clearly enough that *dakṣa* must have meant at one time discernment, judgment, discriminative thought-power and that its sense of mental

capacity is derived from this sense of mental division and not by transference of the idea of physical strength to power of mind. We have therefore three possible senses for *dakṣa* in the Veda, strength generally, mental power or especially the power of judgment, discernment. *Dakṣa* is continually associated with *kratu*; the Rishis aspire to them together, *dakṣāya kratve*, which may mean simply, “capacity and effective power” or “will and discernment” (p. 73).

“Indra in the psychological interpretation of the hymns represents, as we shall see, Mind-Power. The word for the sense-faculties, *indriya*, is derived from his name. His special realm is Swar, a word which means sun or luminous, being akin to *sūra* and *sūrya*, the sun, and is used to indicate the third of the Vedic vyāhrtis and the third of the Vedic worlds corresponding to the principle of the pure or unobscured Mind. Surya represents the illumination of the Rītam rising upon the mind; Swar is that plane of mental consciousness which directly receives the illumination. Vayu on the other hand is always associated with the Prana or Life- Energy which contributes to the system all the ensemble of those nervous activities that in man are the support of the mental energies governed by Indra” (p. 73).

“Indra and Vayu awaken in consciousness (*cetathaḥ*) to the flowings of the Soma-wine; that is to say, the mind-power and life-power working together in human mentality are to awaken to the inflowings of this Ananda, this Amrita, this delight and immortality from above. They receive them into the full plenitude of the mental and nervous energies, *cetathaḥ sutānām vājinīvasū*. The Ananda thus received constitutes a new action preparing immortal consciousness in the mortal and Indra and Vayu are bidden to come and swiftly perfect these new workings by the participation of the thought. For *dhī* is the thought-power, intellect or understanding. It is intermediate between the normal mentality represented by the combination of Indra and Vayu and the Rītam or truth-consciousness” (p. 74).

“Varuna and Mitra, Powers of the Truth, are invoked “accomplishing a richly luminous thought,” *dhiyaṃ ghṛtācīm sādhanā*. This is the first occurrence in the Veda of the word *ghṛta*, in a modified adjectival form, and it is significant that it should occur as an epithet of the Vedic word for the intellect, *dhī*. In other passages also we find it continually in connection with the words *manas*, *manīṣā* or in a context where some activity of thought is indicated. The root *ghṛ* conveys the idea of a strong brightness or heat such as that of fire or the summer sun. It means also to sprinkle or anoint, Greek *chriō*. It is capable of being used to signify any liquid, but especially a bright, thick liquid. It is the ambiguity of these two possible senses of which the Vedic Rishis took advantage to indicate by the word outwardly the clarified butter in the sacrifice, inwardly a rich and bright state or activity of the brain-power, *medhā*, as basis and substance of illuminated thought. By *dhiyaṃ ghṛtācīm* is meant, therefore, the intellect full of a rich and bright mental activity” (p. 75).

“The word *usra* is always used in the Veda, like *go*, with the double sense of the concrete figure or symbol, the Bull or Cow, and at the same time the psychological indication of the bright or luminous ones, the illumined powers of the Truth in man. It is as such illumined powers that the all-gods have to come and they come to the Soma-juice, *svasarāṇi*, as if to seats or forms of peace or of bliss; for the root *svas*, like *sas* and many others, means both to rest and to enjoy. They are the powers of Truth entering into the outpourings of the Ananda in man as soon as that movement has been prepared by the vital and mental activity of the Ashwins and the pure mental activity of Indra” (p. 89).

“If we turn to Vedic symbols we see that the Ashwa or Horse is an image of the great dynamic force of Life, of the vital and nervous energy, and is constantly coupled with other images that symbolise the consciousness. *Adri*, the hill or rock, is a symbol of formal existence and especially of the physical nature and it

is out of this hill or rock that the herds of the Sun are released and the waters flow. The streams of the *madhu*, the honey, the Soma, are said also to be milked out of this Hill or Rock” (p. 93).

“Saraswati means, “she of the stream, the flowing movement”, and is therefore a natural name both for a river and for the goddess of inspiration. But by what process of thought or association does the general idea of the river of inspiration come to be associated with a particular earthly stream? And in the Veda it is not a question of one river which by its surroundings, natural and legendary, might seem more fitly associated with the idea of sacred inspiration than any other. For here it is a question not of one, but of seven rivers always associated together in the minds of the Rishis and all of them released together by the stroke of the God Indra when he smote the Python who coiled across their fountains and sealed up their outflow. It seems impossible to suppose that one river only in all this sevenfold outflowing acquired a psychological significance while the rest were associated only with the annual coming of the rains in the Punjab. The psychological significance of Saraswati carries with it a psychological significance for the whole symbol of the Vedic waters” (p. 93).

“Saraswati is the goddess of speech, of learning and of poetry and Bharati is one of her names, but in the Veda Bharati and Saraswati are different deities. Bharati is also called Mahi, the Large, Great or Vast. The three, Ila, Mahi or Bharati and Saraswati are associated together in a constant formula in those hymns of invocation in which the gods are called by Agni to the Sacrifice” (p. 94).

“The rays in the Veda are the rays of Surya, the Sun. Are we to suppose that the goddess is a deity of the physical Light or are we to translate “go” by cow and suppose that Mahi is full of cows for the sacrificer? The psychological character of Saraswati comes to our rescue against the last absurd supposition, but it

negatives equally the naturalistic interpretation. This characterisation of Mahi, Saraswati's companion in the sacrifice, the sister of the goddess of inspiration, entirely identified with her in the later mythology, is one proof among a hundred others that light in the Veda is a symbol of knowledge, of spiritual illumination. Surya is the Lord of the supreme Sight, the vast Light, *brhaj jyotiḥ*, or, as it is sometimes called, the true Light, *rtam jyotiḥ*. And the connection between the words *rtam* and *brhat* is constant in the Veda" (p. 95).

"The gods have this consciousness. Agni, for instance, is termed *rtacit*, he who has the truth-consciousness. Mahi is full of the rays of this Surya; she carries in her this illumination. Moreover she is *sūnṛtā*, she is the word of a blissful Truth, even as it has been said of Saraswati that she is the impeller of happy truths, *codayitrī sūnṛtānām*. Finally, she is *virapsī*, large or breaking out into abundance, a word which recalls to us that the Truth is also a Largeness, *rtam brhat*. ...As Saraswati represents the truth-audition, *śruti*, which gives the inspired word, so Ila represents *drṣṭi*, the truth-vision. If so, since *drṣṭi* and *śruti* are the two powers of the Rishi, the Kavi, the Seer of the Truth, we can understand the close connection of Ila and Saraswati" (p. 96).

How is something so extraordinary as this imagery, which lies far beyond the scope of ordinary mind and our contemporary mental conditioning, even possible, we might ask? Are these names and their rhythmic incantations – this word that breaks out into abundance – actually magical, as some mantric traditions might have us believe? If we persist in following Sri Aurobindo deeper and deeper into his exposition we may begin to feel that the answer to the question must be given in the affirmative. And when we come to Ch. XVI on The Angiras Rishis, we shall find the indication of a proof that could justify this conclusion, although, as Sri Aurobindo will reveal many years later in his mantric poem *Savitri*, what seems to be magical to us may be considered normal at this higher level of inspired knowledge and speech.

Here Sri Aurobindo devotes a few pages to a discussion of the possible existence of legendary families or schools of Rishis, such as Aswins, Ribhus and Angiras referred to in some Vedic hymns, and to the eventual assimilation of such beings into godlike figures as a result of their mystical transformations. But then he turns to a more profound discussion of the etymology of the terms Agni and Angiras, which have the same root and mean basically the same thing, with the nuance that Angiras may specify the flames of the fire Agni, both of which are symbols of the divine will and the action of sacrifice. And then Sri Aurobindo takes up the elaboration of a theme found in various hymns which seems to me to be the central issue and essence of his entire enterprise of Vedic interpretation – the theme that establishes the basis for his massive creative output and his powerful spiritual influence. Commenting here on several verses that refer to the Angiras Rishis, he says:

“The Veda speaks expressly of “luminous sages”, *dyumanto viprāḥ* and the word *sūri*, a seer, is associated with Surya, the sun, by etymology and must originally have meant luminous. In I.31.1 it is said of this god of the Flame, “Thou, O Agni, wast the first Angiras, the seer and auspicious friend, a god, of the gods; in the law of thy working the Maruts with their shining spears were born, seers who do the work by the knowledge.” Clearly, then, in the conception of Agni Angiras there are two ideas, knowledge and action; the luminous Agni and the luminous Maruts are by their light seers of the knowledge, *ṛṣi*, *kavi*; and by the light of knowledge the forceful Maruts do the work because they are born or manifested in the characteristic working (*vrata*) of Agni. For Agni himself has been described to us as having the seer-will, *kavikratuḥ*, the force of action which works according to the inspired or supramental knowledge (*śravas*), for it is that knowledge and not intellectuality which is meant by the word *kavi*. ...Here it is Agni who is the *hotā*, the priest; it is he who is sacrificing to the gods, to his own embodiment, *tanvam tava svām*, to the Maruts, Mitra, Varuna, Heaven and Earth. “For in thee” says the hymn “the thought

even though full of riches desires still the gods, the (divine) births, for the singer of the hymn that he may sacrifice to them, when the sage, the most luminous of the Angirases, utters the rhythm of sweetness in the sacrifice.” It would almost seem that Agni himself is the sage, the most luminous of the Angirases. On the other hand, the description seems to be more appropriate to Brihaspati.

“For Brihaspati is also an Angirasa and one who becomes the Angiras. He is, as we have seen, closely associated with the Angiras Rishis in the winning of the luminous cattle and he is so associated as Brahmanaspati, as the Master of the sacred or inspired word (*brahma*); for by his cry Vala is split to pieces and the cows answer lowing with desire to his call. As powers of Agni these Rishis are like him *kavikratu*; they possess the divine Light, they act by it with the divine force; they are not only Rishis, but heroes of the Vedic war, *divas putrāso asurasya vīrāḥ* (III.53.7) sons of heaven, heroes of the Mighty Lord, ... they have the divine word and the inspired knowledge it carries with it. This divine word is the *satya mantra*, it is the thought by whose truth the Angirases bring the Dawn to birth and make the lost Sun to rise in the heavens. This word is also called the *arka*, a vocable which means both hymn and light and is sometimes used of the sun. It is therefore the word of illumination, the word which expresses the truth of which the Sun is the lord, and its emergence from the secret seat of the Truth is associated with the outpouring by the Sun of its herded radiances; so we read in VII.36.1, “Let the Word come forward from the seat of the Truth; the Sun has released wide by its rays the cows.” ...The Angiras, therefore, is not only an Agni-power, he is also a Brihaspati-power.

“Brihaspati coming first to birth out of the great Light in the highest heaven, born in many forms, seven-mouthed, seven-rayed (*saptāsyah saptaraśmiḥ*), by his cry dispelled the darkness; he by his host with the Rik and the Stubh (the hymn of

illumination and the rhythm that affirms the gods) broke Vala by his cry.” It cannot be doubted that by this host or troop of Brihaspati (*suṣṭubhā ṛkvaṭā gaṇena*) are meant the Angiras Rishis who by the true mantra help in the great victory” (p. 165-169).

Sri Aurobindo developed this idea of the *satya mantra* in later chapters of this text on the hymns to Brihaspati (“Brihaspati gives the Word of knowledge, the rhythm of expression of the superconscient...”), and to Savitri (The Goddess of Illumined Speech who “by the truth is the Creator... by the pressure of consciousness on its own being...”). And this master idea was later developed in much greater detail in *The Future Poetry* as well as in other commentaries on Sanskrit scripture in his various books. But what I hope we can take away from this brief exploration is the implication regarding Sri Aurobindo as the *kavi* who uncovered the power of *mantra* in the Veda and used it to bring down the supramental consciousness and force. This was the *sadhana* (spiritual practice) of the guru of the Integral Yoga and author of the great mantra of transformation *Savitri*, whose power has yet to be fully revealed.

But what we may begin to realize through a study like this is that the faculty of symbolism that has been developed and used in human language, literature, mythology, and philosophy for millennia may have much deeper roots in reality than is generally recognized. In the interpretation of Vedic symbolism by Sri Aurobindo there emerges a theory of consciousness and language whereby the energy of the human mind can be elevated to a level of intensity and luminosity that has a direct perception of the unity of universal Truth and the forces that create its individual forms of expression in the universe. There is a latent capacity in human consciousness, according to this theory, which can generate an energy of creative harmony and bliss which becomes “the knower of all things born”. And this supramental consciousness has the

power to see the Infinite in the finite, and to bring the knowledge and force of an essential immortality down into mortal forms.²

3

The Mother's Flowers and their Symbolic Meaning

The concept of symbolism discussed in the first section of this exploration focused on the relative nature of symbolic language used by the mind to represent things experienced in the world. The kind of knowledge expressed by such language might be termed “practical” and “intellectual”. It is constructed by the mind and carries with it an implicit awareness of the fundamental difference between what it thinks and says and the world it represents. In the second section we have encountered another kind of symbolism in which the knowledge and the language used to express it achieve a unity beyond the scope of the intellectual mind and its experience. The language used is still symbolic to the extent that the words and images used convey experiences and realities that are entirely different from what is said, in the same way that metaphorical language is generally different from and often even the opposite of what it represents. But in the case of Vedic symbolism the intensity of the language itself and the consciousness that generates it convey in an immediate and direct way what is seen and heard by the intuitive faculties known as *śruti* and *dṛṣṭi*. In both cases we are speaking about knowledge obtained by consciousness through experience and expressed by language that is symbolic, but the types of knowledge are different in the two cases. Perhaps the difference can be indicated most adequately by saying that one is the product of the intellect based on information obtained by the senses and the rational faculty, and the other is the product of an intuition based on information obtained by the supra-rational

2 I have attempted to demonstrate this theory of mantric rhythm and energy in the Vedic hymns and in *Savitri* for the past 50 years, and I am attaching a link here to a workshop in which I have tried to demonstrate it, especially in session #4. <http://universityofhumanity.org/wp/recentposts/savitri-and-death-books-9-11-august-2017-by-rod-hemsell/>

faculty. In the former case, the knowledge is of things of material equivalence; in the latter case, the knowledge is of things of spiritual equivalence.

In the case of the Mother's work with flowers and their messages, we have the opportunity to explore a third dimension of the use of symbolic language, which might be termed "psychic". In the introduction to the book *Flowers and their Messages* (1979)³, the Mother says, "Since flowers are manifestations of the psychic in the vegetal kingdom, love of flowers would mean that one is drawn by the psychic vibration and consequently by the psychic in one's own self. When you are receptive to the psychic vibration, that puts you in a more intimate contact with the psychic in your own self. Perhaps the beauty of flowers too is a means used by Nature to awaken in human beings the attraction for the psychic. ... When one is in conscious contact with one's own psychic, one becomes aware of an impersonal psychic behind the whole creation and then, through this, one can enter into contact with flowers and know the psychic prayer they represent" (p.II-III).

And with regard to the theme of assigning equivalences to symbols, which we have seen is a typical function of the intellect in using language to express meaning, as well as of the supramental intuition, the same function is used by the Mother with regard to psychic experience and flowers. She says, "It is plants that are most open, on the material plane, to my influence – I can transmit a state of consciousness more easily to a flower than to a man: it is very receptive, though it does not know how to formulate its experience to itself because it lacks a mind. But the pure psychic consciousness is instinctive to it. When, therefore, you offer flowers to me, their condition is almost always an index of yours. ... If your aspiration is strong your flower-offering will be fresh. And if you are receptive

3 This is the second edition, printed in Auroville at Auropress, and the first was published in 1972 when I was the English proofreader there, and the proofs were flowing back and forth between the Mother and the editors on a daily basis.

you will be also very easily able to absorb the message I put in the flowers I give you. When I give them, I give you states of consciousness; the flowers are the mediums and it all depends on your receptivity whether they are effective or not” (p. IV).

“There is a mental projection when you give a precise meaning to a flower. It can answer, vibrate to the contact of the projection, accept the meaning, but a flower has no equivalent for the mental consciousness. ...in the flower it is something like the movement of a baby – it is neither a sensation nor a feeling, but something of both; it is a spontaneous movement, a very special vibration. If you are in contact with it, if you feel it, you can get an impression which may be translated as a thought. That is how I give a meaning to flowers and plants. There is a kind of identification with the vibration, a perception of the quality that it represents. Little by little, by a kind of approximation that sometimes comes all of a sudden and on other occasions needs time, there occurs a close approach between these vibrations, that are of the vital-emotional order, and the vibration of mental thought. If there is sufficient accord, you have a direct perception of what the plant may signify” (p. VI).

Through her example and the knowledge she conveyed over many years as guru of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, dispensing flowers daily to everyone and conveying the psychic qualities that she wanted to develop in us, we may cultivate a sensitivity both to flowers and to our own subtler natures, and learn yet another level of consciousness and symbolism than those studied above. In this case the flower symbol and what it represents become vibrationally, perceptively identical, to an extent that has not been seen in either the intellectual or the intuitive forms of symbolism, although the approximation to identity is much closer in the latter than in the former.

We may look briefly at a few examples, such as the Dahlia, of which many varieties are cultivated in the Ashram. Its general significance is “nobility”, and in contemplating the large red

variety we might experience “The incapacity for any pettiness either of sentiments or of action.” The large, pure-white variety, might speak to our inner nature about a “superhumanity” that is “the aim of our aspiration,” or the large orange-yellow variety may convey a “supramentalized mental dignity that tolerates no pettiness in the thought turned towards the Truth” (p. 89). Turning to the rose, which generally signifies “love” we learn that the red rose conveys “human passions changed into love for the divine”; the yellow rose signifies “mental love for the divine”; the white rose represents “integral love for the divine,” and so on (p. 220-221). There is a pattern that we may notice here with respect to colors in many types of flowers with multiple varieties, and there are other families of qualities that we can notice associated with size, shape, fragrance, seasons, blossoming patterns, and so on, if we want to try to make a scientific system of the art. But this will not lead to the deeper cultivation of the potential qualities of our true selves which is the aim of this symbolic language. It is a language of vibrational realities that we can embody and express along with flowers that have similar capacities. And this art, or occult science, is not the province of the Mother alone. It has been practiced by many occultists, such as Madame Theon, who was one of the Mother's teachers, and by the well-known Sufi master, Hazrat Inayat Khan, for example. And in popular culture the flower essences of Dr. Edward Bach provide a familiar example of this type of symbolism, in which external or material forms of nature are identified with subtle and more or less invisible qualities and potentials of human nature. These are realities that are to be found on a plane of existence other than the physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual, and yet they form a subtle link of consciousness and energy between the inner selves of things and the other external levels of their being and nature. The Mother has catalogued more than a thousand such qualities, and can bring them to birth in us if we surrender to her Divine Force. Similarly, if we invoke Agni and Savitri by generating the satya mantras of Sri Aurobindo, we may learn the truths of the spiritual planes of which all forms are temporal manifestations.

4

The Symbolism of Savitri

Attempting to interpret the symbolism of *Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol*, by Sri Aurobindo, would be an undertaking tantamount to a hermeneutics of the Bible, the Odyssey, or the Mahabharata, with their plethora of mythical heroes, gods, characters, and events. But for the purpose of this essay on symbolism, it will be enough to focus on a few aspects of the two main characters, Aswapati and Savitri, to bring to awareness this extraordinary example of inspired symbolic speech.

Aswapati symbolizes the spiritual hero or yogi whose self-sacrifice and personal effort enable him to ascend from the human plane to the plane of the immortals, experience union with the Divine Mother, and bring down the force of consciousness that will enable humanity to be transformed and perfected. This would be the traditional, mythical interpretation of his character and of the events narrated of his journey. Another common interpretation would associate the mythical character with Sri Aurobindo himself and his practice of yoga. All of Aswapati's experiences and discoveries are closely parallel to the general point of view expressed by Sri Aurobindo in many of his other philosophical, cosmological, spiritual, and biographical writings, and to his interpretation and application of the traditional practices of Raja Yoga, the 'yoga of the king'. Sri Aurobindo, the Mahayogi, is known to have lived a life that was exemplary of such practices and for his achievement of the 'siddhis' prescribed by Patanjali for self-perfection through yoga. A third, allegorical, interpretation would see in the efforts and achievements of Aswapati all the things that those who are on a spiritual journey should practice and aim to achieve. Through our reading of *Savitri*, and from the symbolic aspects of Aswapati, we may gain a knowledge, and perhaps an intimate understanding, of the heroic spirit of great yogis, of the

life of Sri Aurobindo, and of the path to be followed for spiritual transformation. Let us note, however, that neither the symbols nor the content we derive from their symbolic meanings are the things that are represented by them. Great yogis, the life of Sri Aurobindo, and the path of spiritual transformation will remain quite far from what any of us really knows or can do. The symbols, however vivid they may be to our minds, remain worlds apart from and inherently different from the things they represent, as we have shown above. This is the essential mystery of symbolic language.

In *Savitri*, however, we may begin to perceive another dimension of this mystery. Savitri, the goddess, represents and personifies a power of consciousness that is yet to be manifested, and is therefore largely unknown except to the yogi's prophetic vision. It is a spiritual range of consciousness that Sri Aurobindo hopes to bring into awareness, in order to make it more accessible and realizable, through the medium of poetic speech. For example, he conveys a glimpse of its nature in this description of her:

Aware of forms to which our eyes are closed,
Conscious of nearnesses we cannot feel,
The Power within her shaped her moulding sense
In deeper figures than our surface types.
An invisible sunlight ran within her veins
And flooded her brain with heavenly brilliances
That woke a wider sight than earth could know.
Outlined in the sincerity of that ray
Her springing childlike thoughts were richly turned
Into luminous patterns of her soul's deep truth,
And from her eyes she cast another look
On all around her than man's ignorant view.
All objects were to her shapes of living selves
And she perceived a message from her kin
In each awakening touch of outward things.
Each was a symbol power, a vivid flash

In the circuit of infinities half-known;
Nothing was alien or inanimate,
Nothing without its meaning or its call.
For with a greater Nature she was one.
As from the soil sprang glory of branch and flower,
As from the animal's life rose thinking man,
A new epiphany appeared in her.
A mind of light, a life of rhythmic force,
A body instinct with hidden divinity
Prepared an image of the coming god; (p. 356)

This “mind of light” was described at length in the last philosophical writings of Sri Aurobindo, titled *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, and there it was presented as a stage in the evolution of consciousness between the rational mind and the “supermind” between which it might serve as a kind of bridge. The language of that essay, symbolic no doubt, might be termed metaphysical and speculative. And the difference between these modes of speech and the poetry may give us a clue to the fourth level of interpretation that is essential for fully understanding the symbolism of *Savitri*.

We might interpret her mythologically, as representing the “goddess of inspired speech” from the Rg Veda who brings the immortal knowledge to mortals, like Saraswati and Illa, as described by Sri Aurobindo in *The Secret of the Veda*, or as the companion of Satyavan in the mythical story about death and sacrifice in the Mahabharata. And we might interpret her, biographically, as a symbol of the luminous creative energy of consciousness that was expressed, and experienced by many of those who knew her, by the Mother (Mirra Alfassa) during her lifetime as the companion of Sri Aurobindo. Thirdly, we might interpret the symbol allegorically, as the paradigm of self-abnegation and surrender to be achieved by us in Yoga, if we follow the admonition given to her in Book Seven, The Book of Yoga:

If thou wouldst a little loosen the vast chain,
 Draw back from the world that the Idea has made,
 Thy mind's selection from the Infinite,
 Thy senses' gloss on the Infinitesimal's dance,
 Then shalt thou know how the great bondage came.
 Banish all thought from thee and be God's void.
 Then shalt thou uncover the Unknowable
 And the Superconscient conscious grow on thy tops;...
 Consent to be nothing and none, dissolve Time's work,
 Cast off thy mind, step back from form and name.
 Annul thyself that only God may be. (p. 537)

But then, we must ask: Why would Sri Aurobindo have devoted so many years of his life to writing a poem about symbolic characters who embody the same principles that he had already elaborated in detail in his philosophical works, and demonstrated in his own life, along with others in the great tradition and history of Indian spirituality? The answer is to be found in the Vedic idea and practice of *mantra* mentioned above, and in his elaboration of it in his book titled *The Future Poetry*. It is a fourth level of hermeneutical interpretation known as *anagogical*, from the Greek ἀναγωγή, which affirms the power of a certain category of symbolism to raise consciousness above its normal intellectual levels of understanding and put it in direct contact with higher and subtler spiritual realities. According to Sri Aurobindo, this power of speech is capable of revealing the innermost spirit and soul of such realities to the mind, and because they cannot be seen with the physical eye or transmitted through the abstract faculty of the interpreting mind, it is only through sound that they can be transmitted and received. Therefore it is by a certain power of rhythmic speech, created by one who has realized such knowledge and has the gift of inspired hearing and vision, that the symbolic meaning of the characters and events in *Savitri* can be transmitted to us, and through them our consciousness can become more vibrantly attuned to the realities they represent.

This tradition of mantric transmission has been known and practiced by Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as by the theurgical Hermeticists and Neoplatonists of the Middle East, for millennia. And for those who have only read and not “heard” the pages quoted from *Savitri* above, it will perhaps be good to recall Sri Aurobindo's statements about this unique power of inspired poetry in *The Future Poetry*: “the ear is its only physical gate of entry” (p. 31); and “the ear must find it; it cannot be determined by mental fictions or by reading with the eye” (p. 332). He also explains at length how difficult it may be, in this intellectual age of ours, to grasp such truths, and yet how essential it is to our future. Symbolic representation at every level on which we know it, from the most practical and mundane transfer of information to the most sophisticated theoretical understanding of the world, is one of the great mysteries of human consciousness, and for many systems of philosophical and spiritual thought it has been the fundamental mystery at the core of existence. The work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother may be understood as one of the world's greatest attempts to embody and reveal the power of this hidden Sun.

A Meditation on Sri Aurobindo's Process of Transformation and Early Greek Thought

1

(Summary of the spiritual evolution of the Mind of Light as a prelude to the Supramental Manifestation in the poetry, philosophy, and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo)

1) By a specific kind of *sadhana* (many approaches/practices are possible) we (practitioners assigned this destiny, *sadhakas*) should be able to realize the Brahman/Absolute through a Higher Mind/Illumined Mind ascent in this incarnation:

Mind the thought-driven chariot of the soul
Carrying the luminous wanderer in the night. ...
Abandoning the dubious middle Way,
A few shall glimpse the miraculous Origin
And some shall feel in you (Savitri) the secret Force ...
Ascending out of the limiting breadths of mind,
They shall discover the world's huge design
And step into the Truth, the Right, the Vast.
You shall reveal to them the hidden eternities,
The breath of infinitudes not yet revealed,
Some rapture of the bliss that made the world,
Some rush of the force of God's omnipotence,
Some beam of the omniscient Mystery. (*Savitri*, Bk. XI)

2) By a continuous surrender and aspiration in that realization we should be able to creatively participate, to some extent, in the emergence of the Mind of Light and Truth-Consciousness, among an elite and growing type of intuitive humanity, under the pressure of the supramental descent, over a few generations, by sacrifice and rebirth:

But when the hour of the Divine draws near
 The Mighty Mother shall take birth in Time
 And God be born into the human clay
 In forms made ready by your human lives.
 Then shall the Truth supreme be given to men:
 There is a being beyond the being of mind
 An Immeasurable cast into many forms,
 A miracle of the multitudinous One,
 There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,
 Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.
 It has no home on earth, no centre in man,
 Yet is the source of all things thought and done,
 The fount of the creation and its works,
 It is the origin of all truth here... (*Savitri*, Bk. XI)

3) As that Mind of Light and Truth-Consciousness progress and spread in humanity, the Supermind should have a widening channel of descent and manifestation on all the planes of existence:

Some shall be made the glory's receptacles
 And vehicles of the Eternal's luminous power.
 These are the high forerunners, the heads of Time,
 The great deliverers of earth-bound mind,
 The high transfigurers of human clay,
 The first-born of a new supernal race.
 The incarnate dual Power shall open God's door,
 Eternal supermind touch earthly Time.
 The superman shall wake in mortal man
 And manifest the hidden demigod
 Or grow into the God-Light and God-Force
 Revealing the secret deity in the cave. (*Savitri*, Bk. XI)

4) As the supramental transformation of consciousness – body/ life/mind/soul/spirit – facilitated by the Mind of Light, proceeds down the world stair, a gradual, universal transformation of *prakriti*

should occur (as this plane/type of Being conceals/reveals itself in new forms of wisdom, power, beauty, love, at every level), providing a receptacle for the new species:

The supermind shall be his nature's fount,
 The Eternal's truth shall mould his thoughts and acts,
 The Eternal's truth shall be his light and guide.
 All then shall change, a magic order come
 Overtopping this mechanical universe.
 A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
(*Savitri*, Bk. XI)

5) The manifestation of supramental beings should then begin to appear, bringing about the divinization of earth nature in a rhythmically progressive manner, over perhaps a few centuries (if humanity survives and evolves in this way):

Then in the process of evolving Time
 All shall be drawn into a single plan,
 A divine harmony shall be earth's law,
 Beauty and joy remould her way to live:
 Even the body shall remember God,
 Nature shall draw back from mortality
 And Spirit's fires shall guide the earth's blind force;
 Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought
 A high proximity to Truth and God.
 The supermind shall claim the world for Light
 And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
 And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
 And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.
 A greater truth than earth's shall roof-in earth
 And shed its sunlight on the roads of mind;
 A power infallible shall lead the thought,
 A seeing Puissance govern life and act,
 In earthly hearts kindle the Immortal's fire.
(*Savitri*, Bk. XI)

6) The Mind of Light should then, eventually, become the "norm" for humanity, sheltering in the vibrational field of the new supramental species:

The higher kind shall lean to lift up man.
 Man shall desire to climb to his own heights.
 The truth above shall wake a nether truth,
 Even the dumb earth become a sentient force.
 The Spirit's tops and Nature's base shall draw
 Near to the secret of their separate truth
 And know each other as one deity.
 The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze
 And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face.
 Then man and superman shall be at one
 And all the earth become a single life. (*Savitri*, Bk. XI)

If this sequence or "calendar" is correct, then the transformation of human consciousness into a Mind of Light does not require the transformation of matter, but rather the other way around – the transformation of matter requires the prior transformation of consciousness. And yet it may be true that "normalization" of this new consciousness, as seems to be implied, would only be realized after a higher type of being than the human had appeared in a physical body on earth. The process of this transformation and evolution, Sri Aurobindo envisions in three stages – 1) the descent of the supreme creative principle – Supermind – into the three-fold manifestation, 2) the transformation of "consciousness" from top down, and 3) the manifestation of a super-human race; and then, subsequently, the advent of a "new species" whose power and light shall divinize all of earth nature. In his last writing, *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, he made this sequence more explicit, which he had already indicated in a rather less precise way in *Savitri*. A few excerpts will illustrate the sequence of the process outlined above. And yet, finally, we may still not know whether, in fact, there is any difference at all between the

“transformation of consciousness” and the “transformation of matter” or exactly how the two ideas are related.

“The descent into the earth-life of so supreme a creative power as the Supermind and its truth-consciousness could not be merely a new feature or factor added to that life or put in its front but without any other importance or only a restricted importance carrying with it no results profoundly affecting the rest of earth-nature. ...it would not only establish the Supermind and a supramental race of beings upon the earth, it could bring about an uplifting and transforming change in mind itself and, as an inevitable consequence, in the consciousness of man, the mental being, and would equally bring about a radical and transforming change in the principles and forms of his living, his ways of action and the whole build and tenor of his life” (p. 568).

“...once it has begun, all must unavoidably and perfectly manifest and all parts of Nature must tend towards a greatest possible luminousness and perfection. It is this certainty that authorises us to believe that mind and humanity also will tend towards a realisation that will be far beyond our present dreams of perfection. A mind of light will replace the present confusion and trouble of this earthly ignorance; it is likely that even those parts of humanity which cannot reach it will yet be aware of its possibility and consciously tend towards it; not only so, but the life of humanity will be enlightened, uplifted, governed, harmonised by this luminous principle and even the body become something much less powerless, obscure and animal in its propensities and capable instead of a new and harmonised perfection. It is this possibility that we have to look at and that would mean a new humanity uplifted into Light, capable of a spiritualised being and action, open to governance by some light of the Truth-consciousness, capable even on the mental level and in its own order of something that might be called the beginning of a divinised life. ...Its mentality would be an instrument of the Light and no longer of the Ignorance. At its highest it would be capable of passing into the supermind and

from the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature” (p. 583-584).

“One result of the intervention of Supermind in the earth-nature, the descent of the supreme creative Truth-Power, might well be a change in the law of evolution, its method and its arrangement: a larger element of the principle of evolution through knowledge might enter into the forces of the material universe. This might extend itself from a first beginning in the new creation and produce increasing effects in the order which is now wholly an evolution in the ignorance, and indeed starts from the complete nescience of the Inconscient and proceeds towards what can be regarded even in its highest attainment of knowledge as a lesser ignorance, since it is more a representation than a direct and complete possession of knowledge. If man began to develop the powers and means of a higher knowledge in something like fullness, if the developing animal opened the door of his mentality to beginnings of conscious thought and even a rudimentary reason, – at his highest he is not so irrevocably far from that even now, – if the plant developed its first subconscious reactions and attained to some kind of primary nervous sensitiveness, if Matter, which is a blind form of the Spirit, were to become more alive with the hidden power within it and to offer more readily the secret sense of things, the occult realities it covers, as for instance, the record of the past it always preserves even in its dumb inconscience or the working of its involved forces and invisible movements revealing veiled powers in material nature to a subtler generalised perception of the new human intelligence, this would be an immense change promising greater changes in the future, but it would mean only an uplifting and not a disturbance of the universal order. Evolution would itself evolve, but it would not be perturbed or founder” (p.570-571).

Please mix all these ingredients in a bowl, allow to rise slowly, bake in a stone or brick oven until golden brown, and serve with plenty of soma wine.

2

(Exploration of the metaphysical background of various prophetic texts of Sri Aurobindo and their origins)

The penultimate canto of the poem *Savitri*, originally published posthumously in book form in 1955, and the essay titled *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, written and published as a series of articles in 1949-50, are both spiritually prophetic and philosophically metaphysical like much that he wrote throughout his life. Their primary focus is on such metaphysical terms and concepts as Spirit, Matter, Consciousness, Nature, Truth, and God. Sri Aurobindo was a scholar of both classical Greek and Sanskrit, whose ancient literature abounds in such terms and ideas, which inevitably provided the background for his literary and philosophical creations. To appreciate these texts it is therefore helpful to understand their metaphysical contexts and mythical origins, as well as their immediate poetic force, beauty, and prophetic inspiration. This is especially important if we are to address such questions as those raised above concerning the “transformation of consciousness” and the “transformation of matter,” two ideas that might be considered central to Sri Aurobindo's thought and yet deceptively elusive.

Of course readers of *Savitri*, and students of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, are thoroughly familiar with his constant reference to the theme of oneness and difference in the relations of spirit and matter, but many may not be aware of the pervasiveness of this theme in modern philosophy, in general, as well as in ancient mythology. Throughout the history of human civilization, East and West, from mythical and religious to rational and scientific cultures, these two terms have presented an elusive mystery. In only the past hundred years the definitions of matter, once limited to the perceptible world of earth, water, fire, air, and ether, having passed through an age in which measurability constituted the main criterion for knowing reality, and matter was defined by the

periodic table of elements, all earlier definitions have now been superseded by quantum physics and the idea that matter is an indeterminate infinite. The ideas of spirit have had a similar history of development and variation through the millennia, from an all-creating God, to an Absolute Unknowable, to an Ideal Mind, to an Imaginary arising from neurons in the brain.

One of the earliest, and most comprehensive and widely read expressions of this ineffable mystery was written by Plato in his '*Timaeus*' dialogue. According to him the cosmos was created by the One in its bipolar aspects of Limit and the Unlimited, the former being an excess of every possible Good, and the latter a fathomless emptiness, or "lack" into which the excess of the Good spills over to create a threefold universe: Eternal Ideas or Forms – the Unchanging principle; Time, whereby changing "visible" things could be generated – "a moving image of the Eternal," and the receptacle, or Space – the mother. Among the first forms to be created from these three natures or principles were gods, who were also immortal, and whose business was to create changing, mortal beings – "by interweaving immortality and mortality." Thus, he said, the three principles of existence are "first, that which is in process of generation; second, that in which the generation takes place; and third, that of which the generated things are a resemblance."

This early, rather abstract, metaphysical explanation of existence and creation followed a millennium of mythical thought which Plato acknowledged to be the source of his vision. We might recall here one such myth which the Greeks inherited from earlier mystery cults and which were later reinvested with meaning and initiatory power by the followers of Plato. As the mythologist Erich Neumann explained in his famous work titled *The Great Mother* (1963) "...the Lesser Mysteries preceding the Great Mysteries at Eleusis represented the descent, death, and veiling of Persephone, that is to say the abduction of Kore, leading up to the Great Mysteries with their forced marriage. After Persephone's search for her lost daughter and her sorrowful wanderings, after the period of

anxious waiting in the darkness of death, the central action begins. Amid total darkness the gong is struck, summoning Kore from the underworld (where she was abducted by Hades): the realm of the dead bursts open. There follows the *heuresis*, suddenly the torches create a sea of light and fire, and the cry is heard: "The noble goddess has borne a sacred child." Whether this child is Iacchus, Dionysus, Zeus-Zagreus, or Phanes-Eros, it is the divine child, identical with the center of the vision...the perfect great light that comes from the ineffable" (p. 319).

Neumann tells us, further, that "Kore (khora) was originally an Eleusinian goddess, from about 1000 BC near Athens, origin of all the Greek mysteries. She became the symbol of the birth of the divine child, the light, throughout that period from Homer to Christianity, and was also known as Sofia, the goddess of wisdom. ...in the reunion of the young Kore with Persephone, the Great Mother, the Feminine has undergone a transformation, thus guaranteeing earthly fertility and the survival of life, as by achieving union on a higher plane with the spiritual aspect of the Feminine, the Sophia aspect of the Great Mother, she thus becomes a moon goddess. ...For the nascent Kore no longer dwells as before on the earth, but in conjunction with Persephone becomes the Olympian Kore, the immortal and divine principle" (p. 319).

The reason for mentioning this myth of creation in our context is its connection with both the term "khora" used by Plato in his metaphysical/mythical account of creation, as the "receptacle and mother," and also with a similar formulation of this same idea by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* in Bk 2, Canto 1: "A Mystery's process is the universe. /At first was laid a strange anomalous base, /A void, a cipher of some secret Whole, /Where zero held infinity in its sum /And All and Nothing were a single term, /An eternal negative, a matrix Nought: /Into its forms the Child is ever born /Who lives for ever in the vasts of God" (p. 100). Of *khora*, Plato says, "That which is to receive perpetually and throughout its whole extent the resemblances of all eternal beings ought to be devoid of any

particular form, wherefore the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in every way sensible things is not to be termed earth, or air, or fire, or water, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the Intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.”⁴

Plato's (c. 400 BCE) idea of *khora* was further elaborated by the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (c. 400 CE), whose influence as a philosopher and mystic was perhaps unsurpassed in Western theology even up to the present day. Proclus famously wrote that this *khora* could only be grasped by the “flower of the mind” beyond intellect, and he associated it with a later Greek myth in which Aphrodite, the Divine Mother, descends from the Divine Mind to create the gods and the souls of mortals, and places the god Eros in all souls as the power to strive towards reunion with the Highest Good.

But is this receptacle “matter” or “consciousness” – a most mysterious and incomprehensible question indeed. And it seems to be the mystery that is most central to *Savitri*. For example, after the Yogi Aswapati's descent into the Night of Inconscience in Bk. 2, Canto 8, on his quest to understand the incomprehensible mystery of this world, which he discovers is the result of the descent of the Divine Mother into the Inconscient, and whose soul was made “the body of our state” by her sacrifice, he has this revelation:

Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream.
 Into being's gap scooped out as empty Space
 In which she had filled the place of absent God,
 There poured a wide intimate and blissful Dawn;
 Healed were all things that Time's torn heart had made
 And sorrow could live no more in Nature's breast:
 Division ceased to be, for God was there.
 The soul lit the conscious body with its ray,
 Matter and spirit mingled and were one. (p. 232)

4 Plato, *Timaeus*, <https://www.scribd.com/read/282801466/Plato-The-Complete-Works>, p. 2750.

Into the empty space that I hope to have scooped out in our understanding by these reflections, I would like to pour an ambrosia of awareness of the essential “mystery” that has persisted throughout the development of human consciousness. It has been formulated repeatedly, especially in the mystical, spiritual, and philosophical traditions from which Sri Aurobindo has gathered his most prominent and central ideas, and to which he has contributed perhaps the ultimate reformulation: one that will finally open a pathway for the emergence of a consciousness beyond mind of the Truth of Being. More clues may be found along the path of Plato's mysticism, on which Sri Aurobindo gathered many of the terms and phrases that are found in *Savitri*, especially in Book Two, as we will see: such Neoplatonic terms as Demiurge, Daemon, and Archangel for example. But first I would like to illustrate more specifically the awareness he had of the classical Greek texts that expressed most clearly the mystery we need to contemplate, and the influence they had on his thought, with reference to his study of Heraclitus.

3

(A reflection on the development of *mythos* into *logos* in Greek and Sanskrit spiritual traditions, and the relation of Plato's idea of *khora* to Sri Aurobindo's idea of Supermind)

The metamorphosis of early myths into the forms of early metaphysical thinking is a phenomenon that was documented by Sri Aurobindo in various texts written around 1920. From the ancient Greek mysteries (initiated by those of an earlier Egyptian culture no doubt), to the Pre-Socratic philosophies, to Plato and the much later Neoplatonists, through a thousand years of elevated speech and writing, such terms as *Idea*, *Logos*, *Nous* (Truth, Word, Mind) were transmitted down the ages of Western metaphysics, with almost identical parallels in the mythical and metaphysical texts of the Sanskrit cultures. Sri Aurobindo emphasized this origin and descent of similar streams of inspired thought in Greece and

India by focusing on Heraclitus (c. 550 BCE) in the context of his own philosophy. He wrote:

“Heraclitus is using the old language of the Mysteries, though in his own new way and for his own individual purpose, when he speaks of Hades and Dionysus and the everliving Fire or of the Furies... When Heraclitus speaks of the dry or the moist soul, it is of the soul and not the intellect that he is thinking, in Indian psychology, *psuche* and not *nous*. *Psuche* corresponds roughly to *cetas* or *citta* of Indian psychology, the *nous* to *buddhi*; the dry soul of the Greek thinker corresponds to the purified heart-consciousness, *shuddha citta*, of the Indian psychologists, which in their experience was the first basis for a purified intellect, *vishuddha buddhi*. The moist soul is that which allows itself to be perturbed by the impure wine of sense ecstasy, emotional excitement, an obscure impulse and inspiration whose source is from a dark underworld. Dionysus is the god of this wine-born ecstasy, the god of the Bacchic mysteries, – of the “walkers in the night, mages, bacchanals, mystics”: therefore Heraclitus says that Dionysus and Hades are one. ...To ignore the influence of the mystic thought and its methods of self-expression on the intellectual thinking of the Greeks from Pythagoras to Plato is to falsify the historical procession of the human mind. It was enveloped at first in the symbolic, intuitive, esoteric style and discipline of the Mystics, – Vedic and Vedantic seers, Orphic secret teachers, Egyptian priests. From that veil it emerged along the path of a metaphysical philosophy still related to the Mystics by the source of its fundamental ideas, its first aphoristic and cryptic style, its attempt to seize directly upon truth by intellectual vision rather than arrive at it by careful ratiocination, but nevertheless intellectual in its method and aim. This is the first period of the Darshanas in India, in Greece of the early intellectual thinkers” (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 219-220).

“Heraclitus tells us (that) all indeed comes into being according to strife, but also all things come into being according to Reason,

kat'erin but also *kata ton logon*. What is this Logos? It is not an inconscient reason in things, for his Fire is not merely an inconscient force, it is Zeus and eternity. Fire, Zeus is Force, but it is also an Intelligence; let us say then that it is an intelligent Force which is the origin and master of things. Nor can this Logos be identical in its nature with the human reason; for that is an individual and therefore relative and partial judgment and intelligence which can only seize on relative truth, not on the true truth of things, but the Logos is one and universal, an absolute reason therefore combining and managing all the relativities of the many. ... Heraclitus might not so have phrased it, might not have seen all that his thought contained, but it does contain this sense when *his different sayings are fathomed and put together in their consequences*. (My emphasis, for it is important to note that this is exactly what Sri Aurobindo has done.)

“We get very near the Indian conception of Brahman, the cause, origin and substance of all things, an absolute Existence whose nature is consciousness (Chit) manifesting itself as Force (Tapas, Shakti) and moving in the world of his own being as the Seer and Thinker, *kavirmanishi*, an immanent Knowledge-Will in all, *vijnanamaya purusa*, who is the Lord or Godhead, *ish*, *ishvara*, *deva*, and has ordained all things according to their nature from years sempiternal, – Heraclitus’ “measures” which the Sun is forced to observe, his “things are utterly determined.” This Knowledge-Will is the Logos. The Stoics spoke of it as a seed Logos, *spermatikos*, reproduced in conscious beings as a number of seed Logoi; and this at once reminds us of the Vedantic *prajna purusa*, the supreme Intelligence who is the Lord and dwells in the sleep-state holding all things in a seed of dense consciousness which works out through the perceptions of the subtle Purusha, the mental Being. Vijnana is indeed a consciousness which sees things, not as the human reason sees them in parts and pieces, in separated and aggregated relations, but in the original reason of their existence and law of their existence, their primal and total truth; therefore it is the seed Logos, the originative and determinant

conscious force working as supreme Intelligence and Will. The Vedic seers called it the Truth-consciousness and believed that men also could become truth-conscious, enter into the divine Reason and Will and by the Truth become immortals, *anthropoi athanatoi*” (p. 250-251).

To further illustrate the parallels between this Greek tradition and the Sanskrit, and especially their apparent intersection or convergence of aims in what we know as Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, we may turn to a comment by Gregory Shaw, a scholar of Neoplatonism, as well as Tantra, who teaches currently at Stonehill College. He writes:

“We have forgotten the rich tradition in which Platonists lived in the body of a Demiurge whose powers are expressed in nature and through whom – in theurgy – we become divine incarnations. For Iamblichus, this was the ancient and universal religion preserved by Egyptians, received by Pythagoras and Plato, and sustained by theurgists. Yet this tradition was at risk because Greek intellectuals wanted to gloss over the chora and the catharsis required in mystagogy. Iamblichus recognized that it is precisely through this nothingness—through giving up our intellectual grasping and making our minds passive, a receptacle, a chora – that we enter the labor pains of demiurgy. It is then that the purified soul realizes its cosmogonic function defined by Iamblichus as “the contribution of power, life, and activity from wholes to parts.” By transforming ourselves into the chora, the “pure and divine matter” that is prior to creation, we become creators of the world with the Demiurge. In the Symposium of Plato, Diotima reveals to Socrates that this is our deepest desire. What eros wants, she tells him, is not beauty but to give birth in beauty, for it is through this activity that we partake of immortality. What the initiates of mystagogy want is not divinity – that is the exoteric explanation: what they want is to give birth to the world. They want to embody the Demiurge.”⁵

5 Shaw | The Chora of the Timaeus and Iamblichean Theurgy, https://www.academia.edu/4112261/Chora_in_the_Timaeus_and_Iamblichean_Theurgy.

These ancient mythemes of the Greek mysteries were turned into philosophemes by Plato's account of the creation of the Logos by the Demiourgos through the “between” of the Khora, and by the later Neoplatonists, who saw her as Aphrodite, the “between” who gives birth to Souls and Eros for the descent of Nous into Time, and the striving of beings to return to the Beautiful and the Good. If we can visualize supermind (the Divine Mother) as “the nexus of Spirit and Matter,” it begins to resemble the Platonic idea of khora, that incomprehensible place where being and beings, visible and invisible, consciousness and force are joined, beyond the ontological difference. Isn't this what Sri Aurobindo suggests in *The Supramental Manifestation on Earth*:

“...it is only by the descent of supermind and the fulfillment of mind and life by their self-exceeding that this secret intention in things, this hidden meaning of Spirit and Nature can become utterly overt and in its totality realisable. This is the evolutionary aspect and significance of supermind, but in truth it is an eternal principle existing covertly even in the material universe, the secret supporter of all creation, it is that which makes the emergence of consciousness possible and certain in an apparently inconscient world and compels a climb in Nature towards a supreme spiritual Reality. It is, in fact, an already and always existent plane of being, the nexus of Spirit and Matter, holding in its truth and reality and making certain the whole meaning and aim of the universe” (p. 582).

4

(Glimpses of a pathway towards a resolution of the enigma, beyond the limits of the rational mind)

An enigmatic problem that arises from a reflection on the process of transformation – a process that Sri Aurobindo describes specifically as the transformation of our limited rational mind into a Mind of Light on the way to a supramental Truth-Consciousness – is one that seems to have characterized every mystical and

philosophical attempt to understand and uplift the world of human experience: the problem of reconciling the spiritual and material aspects of existence. Plato solved the problem by hypothesizing a “between” that he called “receptacle, mother, nurse”—khora. In his thought, this mysterious and incomprehensible “place” receives the ideal forms of the One and gives birth to the Many – beings that populate our experience. On the basis of this rather “dualistic” solution, some schools of thought have concluded that only one of the two poles is real and the other is an illusion: either the material world is an illusion or consciousness is an illusion. But Sri Aurobindo elaborated a third position, derived from a certain trend of Vedic thought, which holds that Consciousness and Force are “dual Powers” of One Infinite Being, which can be known through a process of transformation.

Sri Aurobindo's emphasis is on opening to a supramental descent from the spiritual pole to achieve an ascent beyond ‘rational mind’ and create a channel for the evolutionary emergence of a “mind of light.” This is where the Supramental Force, the Divine Mother, unites spirit and matter in one integral, ascending and descending, evolutionary process of consciousness-force, mind-body, spirit-nature. Her soul which is “the body of our state” is also the life and mind and overmind and supermind of our state: khora.

There is a creation myth recorded in the Vishnu Purana, similar to those of ancient Greece, and closely related to the later schools of Sanskrit philosophy known as Sankhya and Vedanta, upon which, to a large extent, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy may be considered a commentary. Here again the mythemes which become philosophemes form a close parallel to the same developments in the Greek tradition, but there is an essential difference, which may make all the difference:

“Vishnu, being thus discrete and indiscrete substance, spirit, and time, sports like a playful boy, as you shall learn by listening to his frolics. That chief principle (Pradhana), which is the indiscrete

cause, is called, by the sages, also Prakriti (nature): it is subtle, uniform, and comprehends what is and what is not (or both causes and effects); is durable, self- sustained, illimitable, undecaying, and stable; devoid of sound or touch, and possessing neither colour nor form; endowed with the three qualities (in equilibrium); the mother of the world; without beginning: and that into which all that is produced is resolved. By that principle all things were invested in the period subsequent to the last dissolution of the universe, and prior to creation. For Brahmans, learned in the Vedas, and teaching truly their doctrines, explain such passages as the following as intending the production of the chief principle (Pradhana). “There was neither day nor night, nor sky nor earth, nor darkness nor light, nor any other thing, save only One, unapprehensible by intellect, or That, which is Brahma and Purusa (spirit) and Prakriti (matter). ‘The two forms which are other than the essence of unmodified Vishnu are Pradhana (matter) and Purusha (spirit); and his other form, by which those two are connected or separated, is called Kala (time).’” When discrete substance is aggregated in crude nature, as in a foregone dissolution, that dissolution is termed elemental (Prakriti). The deity as Time is without beginning, and his end is not known; and from him the revolutions of creation, continuance, and dissolution unintermittingly succeed: for, when, in the latter season, the equilibrium of the qualities (Pradhana) exists, and spirit (Purusa) is detached from matter, then the form of Vishnu which is Time abides. Then the supreme Brahma, the supreme soul, the substance of the world, the lord of all creatures, the universal soul, the supreme ruler, Hari, of his own will having entered into matter and spirit, agitated the mutable and immutable principles, the season of creation being arrived. In the same manner as fragrance affects the mind from its proximity merely, and not from any immediate operation upon mind itself, so the Supreme influenced the elements of creation. Purushottama is both the agitator and the thing to be agitated; being present in the essence of matter, both when it is contracted and expanded.”⁶

6 <https://www.vyasaonline.com/vishnu-purana/>

There is a Self that is both Consciousness and Force, Spirit and Nature, Eternity and Time, which passes into and out of existence, from non-being to being like the expansion and contraction of breath. It is only our limited rational mind that perceives “difference” as paramount and wants to separate the two principles or aspects of Being in order to explain its own perceptions and conceptions. The dualism that characterizes Plato's dilemma epitomizes this “defect” of mind that is pervasive throughout the traditions of mysticism and metaphysical philosophy through the ages, down to the scientific metaphysics of today. A satisfactory solution cannot be found in either the negation of one aspect or the other, nor in hypothesizing a mysterious between. It depends upon an “integral transformation” of the mind-body duality by the descent of a higher power of Consciousness-Force.

The original descent of Supermind into the Inconscience – the “matrix nought” – from which Prakriti (nature) begins her upward evolution, is neither exclusively physical, vital, or mental, in the sense of a strict separation of the planes, but constitutes the whole unfolding of the time-space-continuum as an embodiment of Purusa (spirit). There is a descent at each level or principle of existence, and an “inception” that begins its emergent ascent back towards the divine origin, through the planes of soul-matter-life-mind-spirit, as beings with invisible souls and visible forms evolve the Many, forms of the One.

Perhaps we could help Plato solve his problem of the incomprehensible khora, along with our more general problem of the process of transformation, by imagining that the opposite principles of Spirit and Matter are polarities and not dualities. With such a perspective in view, we may conceive of the excess of good or the infinite resource (*poros*) as a kind of non-existence, and the excess of defect or infinite lack (*penia*) as also a kind of non-existence, between which a kind of existence begins to resonate – a vibration, like sound waves emerging between extremes of subtlety and density that very gradually create a field of interacting

intensities such that subjectivity and objectivity arise simultaneously. The vibrational patterns in this mysterious “place” form increasingly complex densities, frequencies, intensities, relationships of diverse qualities, types, orders, systems, over billions of “years” that eventually include both visible objects and their vision, both seeing and the seen. These subjects and objects of appearance and perception are complementary relations between invisible ideas and visible energies. Such relative forms of Being and Knowing would then constitute both “consciousness” and “matter” in the “between” of a khora that is an actual world of beings that embody a world of ideas, in the vibrational complexities now known as the body-life-mind of the cosmos. Plato in fact recommended that things as we normally experience them should not be named a “this” or a “that” but as a temporal “such” that embodies an eternal Form. As many schools of Yoga recommend we must negate the habitual perceptions and conceptions of the rational mind with its ego-sense of separateness if we are to grasp the truth of Being. The dynamic processes of souls, purposes, and processes embodied in this world are merely the means of manifesting and realizing the Unchanging Good in an Ever-Changing Nature.

In this conception, the Supramental Consciousness-Force is both the origin and the receptacle of the Knowledge-Will of the Eternal Logos; She is the positive pole of existence, and in her descent into the Inconscient, she is also the negative pole of existence, from which the two principles of Time and Space come into being. Let us note, again, that polarities are essentially unities. At the upper antipode of experience, she is what the Mother (Mirra Alfassa), in her realization of this power of supramental consciousness, called “That Vibration.” Perhaps we can visualize, at this point – here where we stand* – a horizontal polarity of Ishvara-Shakti becoming a vertical polarity of Purusa-Prakriti, and at the core of their intersection is this dynamic evolutionary world arising and

vanishing on waves of darkness and light in our sea of temporal experience. As Sri Aurobindo writes in *Savitri*, Bk. 1, Canto 4:⁷

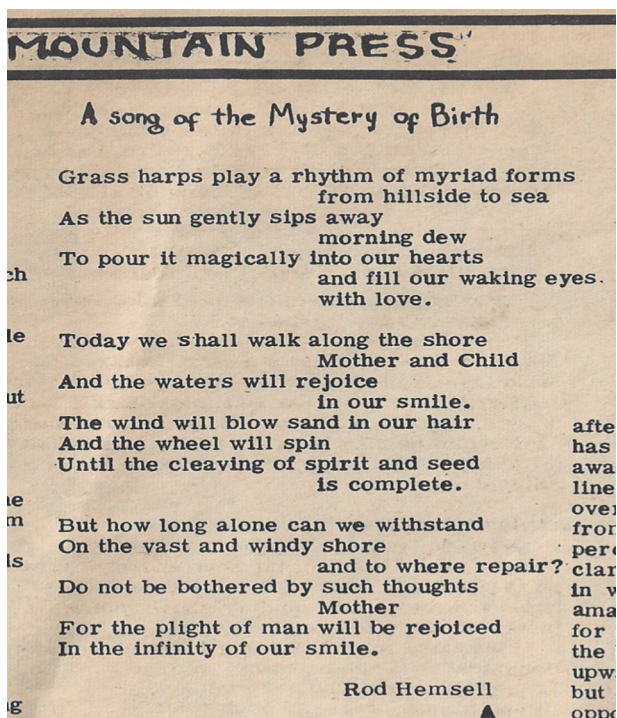
Ascending and descending twixt life's poles
 The seried kingdoms of the graded Law
 Plunged from the Everlasting into Time,
 Then glad of a glory of multitudinous mind
 And rich with life's adventure and delight
 And packed with the beauty of Matter's shapes and hues
 Climbed back from Time into undying Self,
 Up a golden ladder carrying the soul,
 Tying with diamond threads the Spirit's extremes. ...
 An organ scale of the Eternal's acts,
 Mounting to their climax in an endless Calm,
 Paces of the many-visaged Wonderful,
 Predestined stadia of the evolving Way,
 Measures of the stature of the growing soul,
 They interpreted existence to itself
 And, mediating twixt the heights and deeps,
 United the veiled married opposites
 And linked creation to the Ineffable. (p. 89)

* Let us drop the veils of this laborious intellectual weaving for a moment and simply contemplate the table, vase, and rose that appear in front of us, in the clearing of an open mind, and let us behold, not such things as the products of carpentry, pottery, and horticulture that we habitually perceive, but in their space the divine stability and support, the divine receptivity and containment, the divine love and beauty embodied in this table, this vase, and this rose, – the visible invisible reality, present and radiant in the stillness of the soul.

7 *Savitri — A Legend and a Symbol*, <https://www.sriarobindoashram.org/sriarobindo/writings.php>

Poetizing Spirit – Part I

Reflections on two poems of sea and shore – 1967 and 2017



I was rereading this old poem from the 60s, which I didn't remember at all except that it had been published at the time in a California journal called *Black Mountain Press* (edited and published by Claire Worden, *aka* Dietra). Constance found it on eBay earlier this year. Now I am reading it in the context of the “Ister”, a course given by Heidegger on Hölderlin's poetry⁸, and

8 Martin Heidegger (1942), *Hölderlin's Hymn “The Ister”*, Indiana University Press, 1996.

applying Heidegger's method of interpretation to my poem 'The Mystery of Birth', which goes like this: the cleaving of the spirit and seed is the liberation of the self from the attachments of normal life and mind, and the winds that carry us along and threaten to pull us down as we walk on that vast shore, between land and sea, between body and soul. The Mother here is the lower hemisphere with its fears and anxieties about life and death, the child is the young spirit of freedom and adventure, the smile is the smile of victory and liberation. The dew that is poured into our hearts is the inspiration from the higher planes, from the sun, a kind of essence obtained from experience, awakening our vision of liberation.

When I wrote these things, I was feeling them, and the poem represented my state of mind, but I don't remember seeing clearly the symbolism; it seems that the poetizing of consciousness isn't necessarily aware of its meaning at the time of writing. I had been living in Big Sur where the grass harps play from hillside to sea, a visual impression representing "experience" in general, and I had gone through many experiences during the previous year, including being in a relationship and then breaking up, which at the age of 21-22 was pretty dramatic, etc. You can see in Constance's letter (attached below), published in the same journal, the strong influence of Heidegger, whose books C and I had been reading for a few years, and we had just found Sri Aurobindo recently. I was living in Santa Cruz and C was living in San Francisco. We had known each other since school days and have kept in touch over the years, even up to now (more than 60 years; we both lived in Auroville in the 70s). It was a turbulent but inspired time, and the Mother's call was upon us, though we were just beginning to be conscious of it. We both had visited Haridas Chaudhury in San Francisco during this period. My poem is about the aspiration to be free from the lower prakriti, being influenced by the idea of Yoga, and having some intuition of the possibility. I had not read Sri Aurobindo's poetry at that time but I was definitely influenced by the poetry of Tagore.

Page 5

A Letter

the continuing thread of correspondence...

San Francisco

 .
 .kalagiya! the call

...to Shambhalla.

: the call

 of the creatrix. we are building. the dimensions of appreciations.
 for (each) instance,

 procedure is measured in decisions: this, not this, that, here, or there,
 this way, one, or the other, One, or the Other. towards what do we
 proceed? concentration within the field. one-pointedness. a true
 structure. location within the creatrix. the object: to build... to
 construct the dwelling. the creatrix. locating...

by relating

 and there-by giving the whole. the hierarchy of definition extends.
 consciousness defines itself. the field changes. every element
 moves in the field. the rhythm of dominance and recessiveness. every
 combination of stress and structure is, in sum, History. the qualifying
 of Being. and structured in the creatrix after the form of Man. the
 changing field, the movement of prana through the centers. natural --
 and controlled existence. awaken in the creatrix. knowledge by
 analogy. the question and the answer. where is the point? and the
 field of knowledge. the continuing thread...

 at any rate (of vibration) that which is still (which continues) the
 same...asks to be known as the Same... and asks that the Difference
 be fully appreciated.

One of Heidegger's fundamental ideas, based on the pre-Socratic Greeks and on the philosophy of Hegel, is that it is necessary to become conscious of "the whole," and the whole is Being, which in Neoplatonism is also called the One, or God. This was a fundamental idea underlying much of early and medieval Christian theology. Heidegger's idea of History is that it is a process of the temporal differentiation of the One, or Spirit, as it came to be known in the 19th century, and consciousness is the process of putting all that together in one's experience. This leads to the idea of the Same, or Being, which can be known in all the differences that unfold in the continuum of creation, and gives consciousness the ability to know universals and identities.

Now, rereading Heidegger and his commentary on Hölderlin's poetry, I am looking at my poems in the context of what he calls "the poetizing of spirit." He pursues two strong theoretical lines of development in his study of Hölderlin's poetry: the historical and the spiritual. He is reflecting on a time of inspired thought in

Germany, represented especially by the writings of the three famous friends: Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin. Without going into the details of his argument, I would encapsulate it by saying that one must leave one's natural social and cultural milieu in order to find oneself in the context of what is foreign, and thereby to become able to realize the true value of one's own spirit. Perhaps this can be understood in a brief quotation from Heidegger, based on lines from the poet: "Now come, Fire!" (from "The Ister"); "Because never rules he [the Father] alone/ And does not know all/ Always something stands/ between humans and him/ And staircase-like climbs The Heavenly One down" (from "The One")⁹; and from "The Rhine":

"Yet of their own
Immortality the gods have enough, and if one thing
The heavenly require,
Then it is heroes and humans
And mortals otherwise. For since
The most blessed feel nothing themselves,
There must possibly, if to say such
Is allowed, in the names of the gods
Another be who feels with empathy,
Him they need, yet their ordinance
Is that he must his own house
Shatter and his most beloved
Chide like the enemy and father and child
Bury beneath the ruins,
He who wants to be like them and,
Like a dreamer, not tolerate the unequal."¹⁰
(*Heidegger, 1942, Section 25*).

"For the Greeks, what is their own is "the fire from the heavens," that is, the light and the glow of that which determines the arrival

9 Translation from the original German by Edith Stadig.

10 Translation from the original German by Edith Stadig.

and proximity of the gods. Yet in order to appropriate this as their own, the Greeks had to pass through something foreign, namely through the “clarity of presentation.” They had to be alienated and taken hold of by the latter so as with its aid first to bring the fire into the still radiance of pure lucidity. ...What the Germans lack, what therefore must first come to be encountered by them is that which is foreign to them, is the “fire from the heavens”. It is this that the Germans must learn to experience so as to be struck by the fire and thereby to be impelled toward the correct appropriation of their own gift for presentation. Otherwise the Germans will remain exposed to the danger and the weakness of suppressing every fire on account of the rashness of their capabilities, and of pursuing for its own sake the ability to grasp and to delimit, and even of taking their delimiting and instituting to be the fire itself” (*Section 21*). Heidegger summed this problem up with the phrase “becoming unhomely in order to become homely,” a play on the German word *Unheimliche*.¹¹

The other theory pursued by Heidegger concerns the nature of that “fire,” which he discovers in Hölderlin to be the very spirit of poetry itself. “This German poet must learn to say “fire” in order then to experience what the word of his poetry must be. ...Hölderlin names it “the holy”. The poetic naming of what is originally to be poetized, and is therefore the poetic, properly occurs in Hölderlin's hymnal poetry. This is why the essence of poetizing is simultaneously poetized in this poetry. ... this hymnal poetry is in an essential respect river poetry. The spirit of the river is the poetic spirit that experiences the journeying of being “unhomely” and “thinks of” the locality of becoming homely. As river, that is, as the journeying, the river can never forget the source, because in flowing, that is, in issuing from the source, it itself constantly is the

11 Note suggested by Constance: foreign (unfamiliar, new), I might add parenthetically since “foreign” in a passage about Germany doesn’t immediately suggest the philosophical implications. I (Rod) would also add that “homely used in this way indicates what is usually understood to be the norm, familiar, or the inevitable reality.

source and remains the locality of its own essence. What is to be said in this hymnal poetry is the holy, which, beyond the gods, determines the gods themselves and simultaneously, as the “poetic” that is to be poetized, brings the dwelling of historical human beings into its essence” (*Section 23*).

In this very short selection we get a glimpse of Heidegger's painstaking effort to grasp the essence of what he calls the “poetizing of spirit” in Hölderlin's poetry, along with the importance he normally gives in his philosophy to the historical nature of what it means to be a human being. Following his theory of poetry a bit farther, we read an excerpt from a poem of Hölderlin on the rivers that are central to his poetry, along with a commentary by Heidegger that clarifies his extensive and elaborate interpretation:

“Namely, they are
To be to language. A sign is needed,
Nothing else, plain and simple, so that it carries sun
And moon in the mind, inseparable,
And passes on, day and night too, and
The heavenly feel themselves warm by one another.”¹²

“The rivers are “to be to language.” “A sign is needed.” ...In our very first indication of the fact that, in his thinking “of” the rivers, Hölderlin thinks “demigods” and lets the poetic essence of the poet be concealed in them, we placed emphasis on the fact that the demigod is here experienced as the sayer, the one who names the gods with names. As demigods, the rivers are “to be to language” in a singular sense of the word, they are to be those called to the word... The rivers are meant to serve as an “expression of something,” indeed as “signs of” something else, namely the poets. ...The sign that is needed must be such as to journey through the day, yet through the “night too.” For the night is the mother of the day, in her the dawning and rising of the holy is prepared” (*Section 24-25*).

12 Translation from the original German by Edith Stadig.

In this poetic and philosophical depiction of the poet as the word, the intermediary and channel between the gods and the beings of earth, and as the journey of awakening, we may not surprisingly find a connection with the Vedic idea of the Kavi, whose cry literally brings to birth the gods in mortals, and a connection between this work of Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo's extensive commentaries on the Vedic hymns. This commentary on Hölderlin was given as a course by Heidegger in 1942, the same year that Sri Aurobindo wrote the essay "On Quantitative Metre," which is a study of the principles of classical Greek poetics applied to English, which he wrote in the midst of writing *Savitri*. I believe he applied the principles successfully and the result is an actual mantric expression of the goddess of illumined speech, whose mission is to point the way for earth and men. She, and this poetry of Sri Aurobindo in general, are characterized by these words of the Lord of Love:

O Savitri, thou art my spirit's Power,
 The revealing voice of my immortal Word,
 The face of Truth upon the roads of Time
 Pointing to the souls of men the routes to God.
(*Savitri*, p. 703)¹³

Looking back now at my early poem, it is clear that the "plight" of man means the unfortunate situation of his/her life, which yet reveals 'the mystery of birth'. Love requires separation, the child grows up, the spirit rises above the body – in seeking liberation from all forms of attachment it must become "unhomely" – in order to find the absolute love, freedom, joy. From attachment (unfreedom) comes freedom, from a sometimes violent separation comes peace and unity, the waters of life rejoice in our liberation from the pull of their tides, from the constantly turning wheel of time comes the infinite, eternal smile. I wonder, however, if poetizing the spirit is different for different times and places,

13 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2007

different histories. Here there is joy in the feeling of resolution, joy in facing the challenge of separation, joy in the sense of freedom, almost exultation. At the same time, in the background, there is anxiety and the fear of separation. Uncanny for sure¹⁴, but looking back on all that followed from this moment, and all that came before it, time seems to have been transcended and the future already settled for this fellow. There doesn't seem to be a "history" to reconstitute and validate, other than the journey itself.

The idea that from separation comes union, the cleavage of spirit and seed, liberation from life into spirit, seems to be essentially, historically, an Indian idea. Perhaps this constitutes a fundamental difference with respect to Heidegger's interpretation of what he terms poetizing the Western, and specifically German spirit in Hölderlin's poetry. Much could be said about this regarding the poet's role in facilitating the descent of the gods, as the rivers bring sustenance and energy to the earth. Both Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo were strong exponents of the idea that their respective cultures were endowed by the gods with divine destinies, and that their poets have played a significant role in the grounding of their respective cultural values and identities. There are prominent differences to be distinguished between the qualities expressed by the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon, and those of the Indian pantheon. And there are prominent differences that distinguish Imperial German culture from Colonial Indian culture. But there are also many similarities that can be easily discovered through a comparison of the works of Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo. In this short essay, however, my aim is to reflect on certain aspects of my own poetry which have come to light for me as a result of reading them against the background of such comparisons as I have been able to make in my studies of Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo over the years, with reference to the texts I have mentioned here.

14 Uncanny is a term used by Hölderlin and elaborated at length by Heidegger, qualifying this aspect of human destiny.

Looking now at my poems, I can make certain observations that would not have occurred to me at the time of writing in any case, but which stand out in this larger philosophical context. My earlier poem titled 'The Mystery of Birth' appears to me now to be particularly naive, almost frivolous, considering the spiritual implications that it seems to have. A critic might say that it is simply "romantic" or, considering the period of culture, that this boy must have been drinking the kool-aid. But from a deeper spiritual perspective, such as Yoga and other spiritual disciplines provide, it might be considered an inspired response to the psychological crises of the time, or even prophetic of the evolutionary urge poetized so eloquently by Sri Aurobindo. In *Savitri*, for example, we hear the words "fear not to be nothing that thou mayst be all." The meaning of negation in Indian spirituality suggests the possible return back from separation to union. Both of these movements 'of spirit' might seem utterly unrealistic to the critical mind of today, but they were articulated in the philosophy of Hegel in the 19th century and were popularly expressed by the phenomenological philosophers and psychologists of the 40s and 50s. However frivolous the idea of a joyful liberation might seem to a skeptical materialist today, I am reminded of Sri Aurobindo's argument in his final writing in 1950, '*The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*', where he says: "The evolution we see around us at present... shows few signs of such a possibility, so few that the reason, at present our only sure guide, has no right to hazard belief in it."¹⁵

Of course skepticism is natural to the mind, as Heidegger explained in a commentary on 'Hegel's concept of experience,' also produced in 1942, because consciousness realizes that it is other than the objects it perceives and knows, and it wants to be certain of the truth of things and of itself. After admitting the doubtfulness of his spiritual speculations, even after expounding them in

15 Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 579, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1998

thousands of pages of philosophy over a period of thirty years, Sri Aurobindo offered two possible proofs: 1) if the supramental consciousness is not the truth then there can be no truth and no consciousness; and 2) it can be verified by direct experience. In my own 'poetizing of spirit' over fifty years, I can say that I have had many insights and experiences that tend to validate both of these proofs.

For the tragic Greek spirit, commented on extensively by Heidegger in this course on Hölderlin, and frequently elsewhere, knowledge of the finality of death makes transcendence possible. The poet's reaching upward to the gods and facilitating their descent requires a heroic sacrifice which in turn gives everything "homely" its value.¹⁶ The traditional Indian idea of sacrifice also brings down the fire of heaven, but it is more often expressed through ecstatic devotional poetry and song rather than through suffering. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual vision seems to incorporate both the Greek and the Indian notions of sacrifice, and one might also say the Christian and Hindu notions of spirit: liberation and resurrection, rejection and affirmation, *nirvana* and *pleroma*, differences united on a higher plane of "transformation." The poet of the Overmind gods and philosopher of the supramental manifestation brings into view the possibility (or reality) of a descent of the divine consciousness, and not only its inspired "word," into this mortal life and world. So, our boy on the beach was, perhaps, just beginning a rather different journey than the one conceived by the German river poet. Let us now have a glimpse of what he saw 50 years later, on another beach, in another time, after many journeys, and perhaps reaching beyond even the un-homeliness of the poetizing spirit:

16 Both Heidegger, in his lectures on Hölderlin, from whom he has taken the concept of "*unheimliche*" in relation to the sacrifice of Antigone, and Sri Aurobindo in *The Future Poetry*, have referred to this tragic play of Sophocles, with reference to which Sri Aurobindo writes: "The poet, his eyes fixed on life, shows us as if by accident the seed in our normal nature which can grow into the spiritual truth of universal love" (p. 235).

Between two oceans

Between two oceans of light a golden river flows,
But where have you hidden your face?
Is your radiance veiled by the ocean and sky?

This little human figure standing on the shore
Is blinded by the blaze of your reflection,
But your brilliance is beyond the power of his gaze.

Even the golden orb of sun
Is a shadow of your luminous presence,
and your light that flows between the stars

Fills the boundless darkness with its glow -
The sparkle of heaven is dimmed by its radiance.
But where have you hidden your face?

Are you there in the spray of glistening waves,
Is it you who have dressed in their whiteness?
Is it you that we hear when they break upon the shore?

Like Rumi on the shores of infinity,
I must wait with the patience of a seer,
For your rising like a moon within my soul!

My head is suddenly bowed by your appearance,
My vision blinded by the force of your transcendence!
I am drowned in the depths of your motionless peace!

Awake at last in the ocean of your light,
My eyes are astonished by the gaze of your delight!
I am uplifted by your tides, upborne on your lightning wings of love!¹⁷

Heidegger, following Hegel, has made a lot of the concept of “appearance.” It was the basis of the philosophy and psychology of phenomenology. And in its profoundest form it says that what appears presences itself to consciousness. Consciousness is potentially, and in its essential Being, the Spirit, the Absolute, the One, which can be known immediately by the Self, and which determines all beings and all things. We are of course very familiar with this notion in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo as well. Consciousness-Force, *chit-shakti*, is a fundamental principle of existence. And it is possible that this is where the Western and Eastern notions of spirit meet and another history begins. Here, on this stretch of beach, where the golden river of poetic vision flows, between the oceans of mind and supermind, where the goddess suddenly appears, not as something seen or thought, but as a seeing, a gaze of divine delight, an infinite ocean of absolute love, a presence and a consciousness that has the potential of transforming life and abolishing death. It seems to me, in this light, that the poetry of the river and the hearth, and the journey that transcends time and space, might become more than an opening of the human to the gods. As the poet and philosopher of the supramental transformation put it:

Authors of earth's high change, to you it is given
To cross the dangerous spaces of the soul
And touch the mighty Mother stark awake
And meet the Omnipotent in this house of flesh
And make of life the million-bodied One. (*Savitri*, p. 370)

Poetizing Spirit – Part II

Reflecting on the unfolding of ideas in the exploration above (Poetizing Spirit – Part I: Reflections on two poems – 1967 and 2017), I have the impression of stepping, jumping, sometimes leaping from stone to stone in a flowing river. For example, I mentioned the idea of “the Same” in association with the Neoplatonic idea of God and the Hegelian idea of Spirit, close to the beginning, and I passed up the possibility of commenting on either of these important metaphysical systems in the history of Western philosophy. But near the end of the exploration another big stone in the stream offered itself, onto which I leaped, where I again associated Consciousness with the One and related this association to Sri Aurobindo's idea of Consciousness-Force. Here I again resisted the possibility of visiting another nearby rock where the systems of Neoplatonic metaphysics were engraved, and then another where Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Indian system of Vedanta could be seen breaking the river's flow, their reflections sparkling in the currents of foam coursing around them. There were several smaller stones near these larger ones where I glimpsed the idea of “representation,” “represented by,” “representing,” words which were also mentioned earlier, and I passed on as before without taking a stand to point out the significance of these terms in the philosophy of consciousness. They especially indicate a theory that is diametrically opposed to the one I am emphasizing. The difference between representational consciousness and knowledge of the essence of things is a concept that would reveal many parallels between Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo, between Western and Eastern metaphysics, and issues on which our destiny today may hinge. But this viewpoint was passed over.

Because this is a particularly important concept in philosophy, and in my own explorations of the meaning of “consciousness,” I would like to pause for a moment here, as I retrace some of the twists and turns in the river of my previous journey. In Heidegger's study of Hegel's philosophy of consciousness in 1942, which I have

mentioned, the important distinction was made between the consciousness that we first have of objects that we perceive, and the first representations that we make of them in the forms of words, images, symbols, ideas and even theories, and the possibility available to consciousness of stepping back from these early impressions and contemplating the appearance of an object in itself. With the appearance of the object in consciousness as such, along with the world of nature in which the object endures and the various influences to which it is subjected, as well as the context of consciousness itself in which it is being present to itself, with all of its experiences, judgments, biases, values and so on held in abeyance, the appearance of the object is now “seen as a whole,” and its essence may be revealed to this higher level of consciousness, as “what it is.” In another study of consciousness that I have published (*The Philosophy of Consciousness – Hegel and Sri Aurobindo*, 2017), I have explained this process of consciousness as a progression from the cognition of something to ideation to understanding and the possible elevation of consciousness to an identification with its Absolute Truth or Being. I have suggested there, and here again in these reflections, that this might correspond to the level of consciousness and knowledge that Sri Aurobindo associates with the term *vijñāna* or *truth-consciousness*.

Heidegger's well-known critique of technology is based on the idea that the rational scientific understanding of things stops at the level of representation, thereby producing a view of reality that cuts across the process of consciousness, preventing it from revealing the truth of things. He argued that this kind of knowledge, as it predominates in the world today, is essentially focused on the reduction of things to forms of energy that can be utilized for the production of technology in the service of capital. This seems to have been a projection or extrapolation from his earlier critique of the German tendency to systemization and its destiny, onto humanity and the world as a whole. He argued that this tendency, and essence, of technology to frame everything in quantitative terms, symbols, and codes, as a “standing reserve” for utilization

and power, which he called *enframing*, endangers humanity's potential of knowing the truth of things and thereby realizing its own essential Being. Its potential dangers were emphasized by post-war German philosophers such as Fromm and Marcuse. Sri Aurobindo similarly characterized the limitations of the human mind's knowledge by its activity of producing only a representation and construction of reality, which makes it incapable of realizing the truth of things and achieving a right arrangement of its life. It is a primary focus of his philosophy and Yoga to establish an evolutionary and spiritual path for humanity in order to elevate consciousness from the mind's representations and constructions to a direct knowledge of the truth of things. The stages of the mind's ascent to supermind are described in detail by Sri Aurobindo, as well as the processes of Yoga necessary for achieving this ascent and realizing humanity's true destiny. He also describes the stages of the supermind's descent back down into mind, life, and body, in a manner similar to the stages of divine manifestation outlined by the mystical philosophy of the Neoplatonists, and glimpsed also in the poetry of Hölderlin surveyed by Heidegger. This early history of Western philosophy and Christian theology constituted an important background for Heidegger's philosophy, and in his critique of technology he calls for us to liberate ourselves from this condition with the aid of beauty, art and poetry. In the East the various cultural forms of these powers are brought forth in humanity by the goddess Saraswati. Heidegger termed his synthesis of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks, the Neoplatonists, and Hegel's phenomenology an "ontotheology," or a theology of Being. Sri Aurobindo was also a Greek scholar and borrowed the term *gnosis*, which is central to his philosophy of a supramental transformation of consciousness, from the Neoplatonists. The goddess Savitri, to which his mantric poem of the same name is an invocation, was another name for Saraswati in the Veda. Because of these associations, along with the methodology of translation and interpretation employed by both of these 20th century seers, it is inevitable that a close reading of their extraordinarily voluminous literary output will yield many illuminating insights. One must

simply move carefully from boulder to boulder, periodically standing and listening to the stream.

As I continue to retrace my river journey, the purpose of which was to reveal certain aspects of my own poetry, against the background of some of the writings of Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo, and as I now survey the gaps between the “stones” in the previous presentation, as well as the frequent recurrence of certain ideas, with many interesting variations in their appearances, I am reminded of another poem, written in 2016, concerning the river as an analogy of my own, and perhaps everyone's, spiritual journey.

How to measure the swirls between the stones:

Let your gaze relax into the width and breadth of the stream that you see

Where you sit and listen to the crashing falls above, and below, the wideness of your view

Gazing upon the ever-flowing patterns, ever-changing now within your vision

When your vision embraces their flow and your stillness becomes their endlessly swirling change.

You are the smoothness of the stones and the swirling patterns of vision and sound

You are the continuous moving swirls that recur within the limits of your gaze

You are the stones that limit the water's flow and give you the measure of its change:

Ever the same in the stillness of your gaze, ever-changing in its
foaming crashing flow;

In the sameness of stone and the water's continuous change,

You are the oneness and the difference that you know,

Like the difference between an enemy and a friend,

Or the difference between a pleasure and a pain,

The positive and negative poles of experience

Whose valences and reversals hold your vision steady

Unchanged by the river that flows between the stones

Smooth and unmoving as the constant patterns of life,

When you step away and stand above the stream of time

Viewing all in the stillness of your unifying gaze;

The river swirls between the stones, forever the same,

Revealing forever its constant patterns of change.

The stones will always be there directing the force of the stream

Like ideas in the riverbed of time, your life the current swirling
between them.¹⁸

18 Ibid.

For those who have a sense of the importance of allegory and analogy as employed in the poetizing of spirit throughout the ages of human history, there will be many stones, large and small, scattered along the river's route from mountain to valley, and eventually to the sea, which body-forth our values, the things that give our lives meaning, the forms that shape our destiny. For those with a sense of the power of poetry to determine the destiny of a people, a nation, or an era of civilization, certain stones will have a special dazzle, a perceptible aura, and one may stand for hours, days, years upon them observing the fluctuations in the stream of time. For others, the millions of tiny shining pebbles that have been ground down, smoothed and rounded by the cycles of time, may provide a more engaging source of interest and reflection, like the practical preoccupations of the agriculturist, engineer, healer and teacher whose lives and work sustain human society. In every case there are powerful universal principles, with the names of gods, that endow each stone with its purpose and destiny. Unbeknownst perhaps to the artisan or technician whose energy and consciousness are the expression of divine forces whose purpose is to establish and maintain these values of human existence, it is the poet's gift and duty to chant the praise of their presence, and to offer to their source, like an ever-present fire near the highest mountain peak, and to the silent glacier lake that reflects its radiance, all forms of this earthly existence as a sacrifice. It is the inspired vision and word of mystic seers, poets, and philosophers, whose gaze surveys the lives, values, destinies of every size, shape, and purpose on earth, and who listen to the roiling current of events that flow around them, that discovers and reveals, in every one, the presence and glory of its infinite Being and Truth, emerging from life to life, from mind to mind, from form to form, like stones strewn across the riverbed of time.

Being this rising...

Soul, heart, mind, speech
How you give yourself
To tree and sky and wind
And spread like them
Beyond the realm of sense
And feel the force that
Moves them deep within;
Yet stand motionlessly still
Like a fire in every cell
Streaming in the stillness,
Being in the freedom of infinite will
Forming every particle of existence
In the body of its limitless self,
Embodying the worlds in light:
Flaming into feeling, birth and death
Pleasure and pain, blindness and seeing
Sameness and difference in Many and One,
Bowing in rose and stone,
Chanting the rising stream,
Flowing through every form,
Giving to each its meaning.¹⁹

19 Ibid.

Perhaps the sun of truth, responding to our call, will release a cataclysmic torrent down from the mountainous sources of consciousness and force, and the gods, who determine the forms of earth, will endow the recipients of their grace with the powers needed to rise above the surge and reach new heights of vision, understanding, and will, in order to resist the tides that could otherwise carry us away. Perhaps we are being uplifted by those swelling tides. And perhaps the great granite stones of destiny will be ground down to particles of sand into which the downpour of inspiration and illumination will disappear as rivers into a desert. This too seems to have been pre-visioned by those philosophers of today who interpret existence as an infinite sea of difference and individuation, driven by the forces of desire, whose being resides in the conceptualizing, representational mind.

The ideas of Sameness and Difference, which have filled thousands of pages of contemporary thought, sometimes glowing with brilliant inspiration, often burdened with painstaking deliberation, formulated by the post-modern thinkers of greatest genius in the late 20th century, were seeded to a large extent by the philosophy of Heidegger. Perhaps their experiences of the contradictory and self-destructive nature of the world that we know so well, will be sipped delicately away like mountain dew from the hillsides of post-modern feeling and thought and poured magically back into our hearts, restoring our sense of the One, touching us with the rays of the sun of Truth itself. Perhaps this light is reflected in the river of my poetic journey.

We have read in Heidegger's writing such ideas translated and interpreted from the words of Plato the Divine, from the Neoplatonist philosophers whose ideas were propagated over centuries of Christian theology, and from the German poets and philosophers of the Ideal, endlessly recapitulated by a generation of post-modernist thinkers. And we have been startled by their often paradoxical, uncanny, and uniquely challenging formulations, such as, for example, in Heidegger's memorable declarations that:

“the Same is truly the same only in that which is different,”²⁰ and “every being can only be revealed in its opposite ... As the will of love, Spirit is the will to what is in opposition.”²¹ Perhaps this sameness of things that are different, this unity of opposites, portends a new “beginning,” as Heidegger defines the coming of destiny, and preparation for the “commencement” of a new cycle of existence – the manifestation of a new consciousness of the sameness and difference that constitutes the essence of Being. Perhaps Being will presence itself to this consciousness as the evolutionary emergence on earth of what Sri Aurobindo has termed “The House of the Spirit and the New Creation,” as if an answer to the calls of our post-modern age from the Overmind plane of the gods where he stood, above the river of Time.

A new and marvellous creation rose.
 Incalculable outflowing infinitudes
 Laughing out an unmeasured happiness
 Lived their innumerable unity;
 Worlds where the being is unbound and wide
 Bodied unthinkably the egoless Self;
 Rapture of beatific energies
 Joined Time to the Timeless, poles of a single joy;
 White vasts were seen where all is wrapped in all.
 There were no contraries, no sundered parts,
 All by spiritual links were joined to all
 And bound indissolubly to the One:
 Each was unique, but took all lives as his own,
 And, following out these tones of the Infinite,
 Recognised in himself the universe.
 A splendid centre of infinity's whirl
 Pushed to its zenith's height, its last expanse,
 Felt the divinity of its own self-bliss
 Repeated in its numberless other selves:

20 Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 1996

21 Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Freedom*, 1985

It took up tirelessly into its scope
Persons and figures of the Impersonal,
As if prolonging in a ceaseless count,
In a rapturous multiplication's sum,
The recurring decimals of eternity.
None was apart, none lived for himself alone,
Each lived for God in him and God in all,
Each soleness inexpressibly held the whole.
There Oneness was not tied to monotone;
It showed a thousand aspects of itself,
Its calm immutable stability
Upbore on a changeless ground for ever safe,
Compelled to a spontaneous servitude,
The ever-changing incalculable steps,
The seeming-reckless dance's subtle plan
Of immense world-forces in their perfect play.
Appearance looked back to its hidden truth
And made of difference oneness' smiling play;
It made all persons fractions of the Unique,
Yet all were being's secret integers.
All struggle was turned to a sweet strife of love
In the harmonised circle of a sure embrace.
Identity's reconciling happiness gave
A rich security to difference. (*Savitri*, p. 323)

Being All-One (Hen Panta)*

1

First rays touch
bamboo leaves,
Buddha's face;
forest stillness
in morning light.

Forest stillness
in morning light;
first rays touch
bamboo leaves,
Buddha's face.



2

Light comes and goes,
bamboo leaves,
Buddha's mind remain,
in the forest stillness.

In the forest stillness,
light comes and goes,
bamboo leaves,
Buddha's mind remain.



3

Being the forest stillness
the passing sun,
the bamboo leaves,
the Buddha's mind,
being One.

Being All-One:
forest stillness
bamboo leaves
Buddha's mind
passing sun.



*It is wise to say the Same: One All
ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶν "ἐν πάντα" (Heraclitus)

Procession

1

Traversing all the ground of earth,
Reviving its sleeping roots and stones,
Sparkling in the warm embrace of Sun
The River suddenly reverses course
And rising from the fields and valleys
Where its normal paths have run
It slowly turns and flows uphill
To meet the descending Light,
Returning to the skies from which it fell.
Opening its heart to celebrate the New,
To all that is past and all that remains
It gives a gracious wave and bids farewell.

2

It disappears in perfect Light
Beyond the limits of earth and time,
Above the highest peaks devoured by Fire
It dissolves in infinite radiance and is Reborn,
United with the One it knows the All.
Bridging earth and sky with currents of Delight,
Cascading back from the etheric peaks,
It gives to every form a sense of greater Life.
Down into the realms of day and night
It carves new pathways for the Gods
Breaking open barriers of falsehood and delusion
It fills every vessel with its streams of infinite Love.

The stages of our descent

Swimming in the sparkling seas of time
And basking in the suns of inspired imagination

We have dreamed of the union of men and gods
Had leisurely visions of an ethical civilization

And taken the first deep breaths, the first strong strides
Felt the first brilliant rays of the spirit's early freedoms.

Uplifted on the mounting waves of ecstatic life and mind,
We have raced toward a distant shore of harmony and delight

Enamored of our soul's unlimited ambition, we have imagined life's final
destination

On the islands of the blest, in mystical kingdoms of blissful heavenly
union.

But soon we were tossed by the treacherous tides of delusion and
destruction
That dragged us down into darkness's depths, and stole away our breath;

Confronted by wrathful demons that raised their angry heads
And demanded that we trade our souls for the promise of death's release

Lashed by the brutal tail of Leviathan, mangled by the hungry jaws of
Mammon,
Enslaved and beaten by the gods of the summits named Shiva, Yaweh,
Zeus and Allah

We fled from those dire abominations and escaped into mysterious inner
worlds
Only to be imprisoned there by the demons of the dark domain of science

Where we endured the dissection of our bodies, the atomization of our souls

And nature's slow asphyxiation in the fire and smoke of anthropocene devastation.

Reborn again and again into the cycles of humanity's slow descent into hell

We have demonstrated our immortality, mastered the turbulent seas of existence,

Revealed the truth of every illusion, defeated the falsehood of every delusion

And unveiled by negation the very Being of Time. The pathway of Timeless Creation is now open.



Mystic Island (with Spanish translation)

In the roundness of rock
In the glisten of waves
In the chill of the wind
In the warmth of the sun
In the emptiness of sky
In the stillness of mind
In the smile of an eye
The many who are one
Embody the beauty beyond

(She brought me here in her car of happy light
On a mystical journey, holding my hand
To read the Master's word to her children
In an ancient cave on a small blue planet
In her magical galaxy of dream, and to reveal
The essence of beauty, beyond appearances,
Beyond sensations and the mind's highest conceptions –
The origin of Agni's manifestation, in rhythmic sound.)

Isla Mística

En la redondez de la roca
En el brillo de las olas
En el frío del viento
En el calor del sol
En el vacío del cielo
En la quietud de la mente
En la sonrisa de un ojo
Los muchos que uno son
Encarnan la belleza del más allá

(Me trajo aquí en su carro de alegre luz
En un místico viaje, sosteniendo mi mano
Para leer a sus hijos la palabra del Maestro
En una ancestral cueva en un pequeño planeta azul
En su mágica galaxia de ensueño, para revelar
La esencia de la belleza, más allá de las apariencias
Más allá de las sensaciones y de las concepciones más
elevadas de la mente
El origen de la manifestación de Agni, en el rítmico
sonido) – *translation by Marga Bauza*



Discovering another shore...

The course and destination of our boat
has slowly found its direction

Slowing on the seas of life's contradictions
Mind's persistent dilemmas and intuitions

Rising and falling on the world waves' flow
And finally falling still, in its place.

Consciousness, the first principle
of existence, its force and time and light:

The universe is its motion,
Its self is the essential presence in all

The mind is its independent variable
The world its forms of beauty and truth.

Finding now the intersection,
the balance and loving embrace:

Masculine and feminine, stillness and motion,
celebrating the delight of integral union.

This knowledge comes not by calculation;
The mind knows the world like the sea knows the sun.

Another Time

Somewhere in this infinite world
A white moon shines upon the snow
And all hearts unite in the spirit's golden glow

Somewhere in this infinite world
Black doesn't mean to serve another's demand
And white doesn't mean to control another's hand

Somewhere in this infinite world
An atmosphere of peace unites all the land
And words express the truths that all can understand

Somewhere in this infinite world
All roads lead to a future that is fair
And a joyful oneness reigns, a fragrance fills the air





Time and the River

Waterbirds waiting for fish,
wind blows them away;

The river flows towards
the end for which it yearns;

Waterbirds return

The geography of destiny

An angry god made the Angry Man
blood-thirsty, greedy, wrathful
fearful, lustful, deceitful
oppressive and patriarchal

“in his image”

“how like God we have become”

A knowing god not far to the west
made the Knowing Man
where flamed on Mount Olympus
the mystic Fire that forged the gods
of beauty, truth, and justice
to empower the Soul of all the world

To rise through strife
and conquer desire
to reach the Light Beyond

A narrow strip of desert
a river and a sea
between the darkness and light
divide the two

The god-men of the desert
and the god-men of the mountains and sea
through centuries of greed and strife
blending their opposite powers
have fashioned a kingdom
of gold and glass

The gods of destiny now
in this partial paradise dwell

in a disoriented time and space
half way twixt heaven and hell

While earlier gods on higher peaks
and an earlier race of men
did dwell in regions of the rising Sun

Where they sang of worlds unknown
and shared an ancient Wisdom
still far beyond the dreams
of this awakening civilization

Yet to its farthest gaze a distant constellation
of love and delight bestows a mystic gleam
a call and inspiration: to shatter the glass illusion
melt the bars of gold, kindle divine inspiration,
beyond the gods of east and west, beyond division -
beyond the mountains of myth and the deserts of delusion
in the unseen worlds of Being, Truth, Good, Immanent Creation
discover the hidden One who is All, manifest the Divine Intention

Negate the desert of space
negate the river of time
negate the sea of difference
negate the nothingness of existence
be in the Ray of the voiceless Unknown

There stand with eyes wide open
and behold the flaming vision
where shine a million gods
whose radiance is the source of all difference

Time, Space, Nature, Life, Mind,
the cycles of birth and death, of war and peace
of creation and destruction,
the beginning and end of existence

Root, trunk, branch, leaf
flower, fruit, and sap
the force of every species on earth
the essence of all sensation and experience
the arms that draw us into their fond embrace
the hands that wield the falling ax and flying spear

These gods of knowledge and power negate,
these forces of illusion and hate,
negate the tides of creation and destruction
whose current's crossing lines
cause civilizations to rise then drag them into the sand,
return these gods of wrathful power and luminous mind
back to the Origin from which they arose

Let only the Excess remain before its lapse into chaos
before the spilling of cosmos into time and space
before the swirling forth of cause and effect
before the possibility of every inception and extinction

Let only the Excess remain,
before the gods of life and mind
were born in the currents of space and time
from which your towers of gold and glass were formed,
plunge back into its absolute emptiness,
and in its infinite oneness let Loving Man stand forth!

Angry Man and Knowing Man
in relative harmony can dwell
and each has learned to control the gods
whose forms they proudly harbor
whose forces they have mastered through greed and strife

But long before these human forms arose
the gods they embody were empowered by the One
with forces that could shape resistant beings
by means that exceed their natural strength

beyond the limits of the souls wherein they dwell
endowing living things with an illusory appearance
an image of deformation struggling for perfection

To overcome this distortion of the ultimate intention
is the challenge these god-men now must face
to overcome their fate of inherent contradiction
to resolve the conflicts of truth with power
of harmony with strife, in a world where change
and difference are the essential conditions
for embodying a perfect formation of the unchanging Origin

An earthquake is rolling across the destined land
still hidden below the range of normal perception
but the towers are shaking, the foundation of glass and gold
though still concealing in its coils of reptilian deception
the growing intensity of inevitable destruction
feels the presence of a transforming Vibration
feels the gods' abdication to original divine Intention

Angry Man and Knowing man
open all the windows and doors
of the mansions you have built,
escape the chains that bind you to illusion
liberate the gods whose powers you now possess
negate the achievements on which your kingdom stands
before the tides of time swallow it into the sands

Leap beyond your limitations with open arms
welcome the Being of Love with folded hands!

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The Stillness

The Silence sends its waves of love
Like Ocean answering the rays of the Sun
From darkest depths echoing the One
A resounding voice setting in motion
The tides of Inspiration, filling space with Light
Opening hearts with words of Adoration
Uniting souls in its single Vibration
The Silence sends its waves of love
Into Time's still ocean.
The message of Silence is heard
Breaking on the shores of Time's vast sea
Its million voices of spray and foam
Echoing back to the creator Sun
Its song of Love's devotion
Filling all hearts with its golden Vibration
The Stillness illumined with Love's deep Radiance
Hears its word of divine Inspiration
Voicing the Force of infinite Creation.



