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Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face. – Sri Aurobindo

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Our Cover: Sri Aurobindo's Symbol

The descending triangle represents Sat-Chit-Ananda.

The ascending triangle represents the aspiring answer from matter under the form of life, light and love.

The junction of both — the central square — is the perfect manifestation having at its centre the Avatar of the Supreme — the lotus.

The water — inside the square — represents the multiplicity, the creation.

The Mother

What Is an Avatar

We see that the mystery of the divine Incarnation in man, the assumption by the Godhead of the human type and the human nature, is in the view of the Gita only the other side of the eternal mystery of human birth itself which is always in its essence, though not in its phenomenal appearance, even such a miraculous assumption. The eternal and universal self of every human being is God; even his personal self is a part of the Godhead, *mamaivāṁśaḥ*,— not a fraction or fragment, surely, since we cannot think of God as broken up into little pieces, but a partial consciousness of the one Consciousness, a partial power of the one Power, a partial enjoyment of world-being by the one and universal Delight of being, and therefore in manifestation or, as we say, in Nature a limited and finite being of the one infinite and illimitable Being. The stamp of that limitation is an ignorance by which he forgets, not only the Godhead from which he came forth, but the Godhead which is always within him, there living in the secret heart of his own nature, there burning like a veiled Fire on the inner altar in his own temple-house of human consciousness.

He is ignorant because there is upon the eyes of his soul and all its organs the seal of that Nature, Prakriti, Maya, by which he has been put forth into manifestation out of God's eternal being; she has minted him like a coin out of the precious metal of the divine substance, but overlaid with a strong coating of the alloy of her phenomenal qualities, stamped with her own stamp and mark of animal humanity, and although the secret sign of the Godhead is there, it is at first indistinguishable and always with difficulty deci-

pherable, not to be really discovered except by that initiation into the mystery of our own being which distinguishes a Godward from an earthward humanity.

In the Avatar, the divinely-born Man, the real substance shines through the coating; the mark of the seal is there only for form, the vision is that of the secret Godhead, the power of the life is that of the secret Godhead, and it breaks through the seals of the assumed human nature; the sign of the Godhead, an inner soul-sign, not outward, not physical, stands out legible for all to read who care to see or who can see; for the Asuric nature is always blind to these things, it sees the body and not the soul, the external being and not the internal, the mask and not the Person. In the ordinary human birth the Nature-aspect of the universal Divine assuming humanity prevails; in the incarnation the God-aspect of the same phenomenon takes its place. In the one he allows the human nature to take possession of his partial being and to dominate it; in the other he takes possession of his partial type of being and its nature and divinely dominates it. Not by evolution or ascent like the ordinary man, the Gita seems to tell us, not by a growing into the divine birth, but by a direct descent into the stuff of humanity and a taking up of its moulds.

(CWSA 19: 158-59; SABCL 13: 149-50) **Sri Aurobindo**

An Avatar, roughly speaking, is one who is conscious of the presence and power of the Divine born in him or descended into him and governing from within his will and life and action; he feels identified inwardly with this divine power and presence.

(CWSA 28: 485) *Sri Aurobindo*

The Work for Which the Avatar Descends

... it is to assist that ascent or evolution the descent is made or accepted; that the Gita makes very clear. It is, we might say, to exemplify the possibility of the Divine manifest in the human being, so that man may see what that is and take courage to grow into it. It is also to leave the influence of that manifestation vibrating in the earth-nature and the soul of that manifestation presiding over its upward endeavour. It is to give a spiritual mould of divine manhood into which the seeking soul of the human being can cast itself. It is to give a dharma, a religion,— not a mere creed, but a method of inner and outer living, — a way, a rule and law of self-moulding by which he can grow towards divinity. It is too, since this growth, this ascent is no mere isolated and individual phenomenon, but like all in the divine world-activities a collective business, a work and the work for the race, to assist the human march, to hold it together in its great crises, to break the forces of the downward gravitation when they grow too insistent, to uphold or restore the great dharma of the Godward law in man's nature, to prepare even, however far off, the kingdom of God, the victory of the seekers of light and perfection, *sādhūnām*, and the overthrow of those who fight for the continuance of the evil and the darkness. All these are recognised objects of the descent of the Avatar, and it is usually by his work that the mass of men seek to distinguish him and for that that they are ready to worship him. It is only the spiritual who see that this external Avatarhood is a sign, in the symbol of a human life, of the eternal inner Godhead making himself manifest in the field of their own human mentality and corporeality so that they can grow into unity with that and be possessed by it. The divine manifestation of a Christ, Krishna, Buddha in ex-

ternal humanity has for its inner truth the same manifestation of the eternal Avatar within in our own inner humanity. That which has been done in the outer human life of earth, may be repeated in the inner life of all human beings.

This is the object of the incarnation...

*

The work for which the Avatar descends has like his birth a double sense and a double form. It has an outward side of the divine force acting upon the external world in order to maintain there and to reshape the divine law by which the Godward effort of humanity is kept from decisive retrogression and instead decisively carried forward in spite of the rule of action and reaction, the rhythm of advance and relapse by which Nature proceeds. It has an inward side of the divine force of the Godward consciousness acting upon the soul of the individual and the soul of the race, so that it may receive new forms of revelation of the Divine in man and may be sustained, renewed and enriched in its power of upward self-unfolding. The Avatar does not descend merely for a great outward action, as the pragmatic sense in humanity is too often tempted to suppose. Action and event have no value in themselves, but only take their value from the force which they represent and the idea which they symbolise and which the force is there to serve.

The crisis in which the Avatar appears, though apparent to the outward eye only as a crisis of events and great material changes, is always in its source and real meaning a crisis in the consciousness of humanity when it has to undergo some grand modification and effect some new development. For this action of change a divine force is needed; but the force varies always according to the power of consciousness which it embodies; hence the necessity of a

divine consciousness manifesting in the mind and soul of humanity. Where, indeed, the change is mainly intellectual and practical, the intervention of the Avatar is not needed; there is a great uplifting of consciousness, a great manifestation of power in which men are for the time being exalted above their normal selves, and this surge of consciousness and power finds its wave-crests in certain exceptional individuals, *vibhūtis*, whose action leading the general action is sufficient for the change intended. The Reformation in Europe and the French Revolution were crises of this character; they were not great spiritual events, but intellectual and practical changes, one in religious, the other in social and political ideas, forms and motives, and the modification of the general consciousness brought about was a mental and dynamic, but not a spiritual modification. But when the crisis has a spiritual seed or intention, then a complete or a partial manifestation of the God-consciousness in a human mind and soul comes as its originator or leader. That is the Avatar.

Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA 19: 159-60, 168-69; SABCL 13: 150-51, 159-60)

If there were not this rising of man into the Godhead to be helped by the descent of God into humanity, Avatarhood for the sake of the Dharma would be an otiose phenomenon, since mere Right, mere justice or standards of virtue can always be upheld by the divine omnipotence through its ordinary means, by great men or great movements, by the life and work of sages and kings and religious teachers, without any actual incarnation.

Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA 19: 148)

The Outer Action of the Avatar

The Gita lays stress upon the struggle of which the world is the theatre, in its two aspects, the inner struggle and the outer battle. In the inner struggle the enemies are within, in the individual, and the slaying of desire, ignorance, egoism is the victory. But there is an outer struggle between the powers of the Dharma and the Adharma in the human collectivity. The former is supported by the divine, the godlike nature in man, and by those who represent it or strive to realise it in human life, the latter by the Titanic or demoniac, the Asuric and Rakshasic nature whose head is a violent egoism, and by those who represent and strive to satisfy it. This is the war of the Gods and Titans, the symbol of which the old Indian literature is full, the struggle of the Mahabharata of which Krishna is the central figure being often represented in that image; the Pandavas who fight for the establishment of the kingdom of the Dharma, are the sons of the Gods, their powers in human form, their adversaries are incarnations of the Titanic powers, they are Asuras. This outer struggle too the Avatar comes to aid, directly or indirectly, to destroy the reign of the Asuras, the evil-doers, and in them depress the power they represent and to restore the oppressed ideals of the Dharma. He comes to bring nearer the kingdom of heaven on earth in the collectivity as well as to build the kingdom of heaven within in the individual human soul.

Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA 19: 174-755; SABCL 13: 165-66)

The Inner Fruit of the Avatar's Coming

The inner fruit of the Avatar's coming is gained by those who learn from it the true nature of the divine birth and the divine works and who, growing full of him in their consciousness and taking refuge in him with their whole being, *manmayā mām upāśritāḥ*, purified by the realising force of their knowledge and delivered from the lower nature, attain to the divine being and divine nature, *madbhvām*. The Avatar comes to reveal the divine nature in man above this lower nature and to show what are the divine works, free, unegoistic, disinterested, impersonal, universal, full of the divine light, the divine power and the divine love. He comes as the divine personality which shall fill the consciousness of the human being and replace the limited egoistic personality, so that it shall be liberated out of ego into infinity and universality, out of birth into immortality. He comes as the divine power and love which calls men to itself, so that they may take refuge in that and no longer in the insufficiency of their human wills and the strife of their human fear, wrath and passion, and liberated from all this unquiet and suffering may live in the calm and bliss of the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA 19: 175-76; SABCL 13: 166)



A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,
Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;
Love in her was wider than the universe,
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.

(*Savitri*, p. 15) Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's Replies to Sadhaks' Queries

There are two sides of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, the Divine Consciousness behind and the instrumental personality. The Divine Consciousness is omnipotent but it has put forth the instrumental personality in Nature, under the conditions of Nature, and it uses it according to the rules of the game — though also sometimes to change the rules of the game. If Avatarhood is only a flashing miracle, then I have no use for it. If it is a coherent part of the arrangement of the omnipresent Divine in Nature, then I can understand and accept it.

*

I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness — if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile. X seems to say that there is no way and no possibility of following, that the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug, — there is no possibility of struggle for one who represents the Divine. Such a conception makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood — there is then no reason in it, no necessity for it, no meaning in it. The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that Avatarhood has any meaning.

*

I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terres-

trial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence, even if greater in degree, that there is behind others — and it is to awaken that that he is there.

The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way — men need not be extraordinary beings to follow Yoga. That is the mistake you are making— to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.

*

Avatarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with the evolution. The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of evolution. First the Fish Avatar, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land animal, then the Man-Lion Avatar, bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped and physical but containing in himself the godhead and taking possession of existence, then the rajasic, sattwic, nirguna Avatars, leading the human development from the vital rajasic to the sattwic mental man and again the overmental superman. Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages, the stages of the spiritual development — Krishna opens the possibility of Overmind, Buddha tries to shoot beyond to the supreme liberation but that liberation is still negative, not returning upon earth to complete positively the evolution; Kalki is to correct this by bringing the Kingdom of the Divine upon earth, destroying the opposing Asura forces. The progression is striking and unmistakable.

As for the lives in between the Avatar lives, it must be remembered that Krishna speaks of many lives in the past, not only a few supreme ones, and secondly that while he

speaks of himself as the Divine, in one passage he describes himself as a Vibhuti, *vṛṣṇīnāṁ vāsudevaḥ*. We may therefore fairly assume that in many lives he manifested as the Vibhuti veiling the fuller Divine Consciousness. If we admit that the object of Avatarhood is to lead the evolution, this is quite reasonable, the Divine appearing as Avatar in the great transitional stages and as Vibhutis to aid the lesser transitions.

(Sri Aurobindo further clarified in another letter:)

The next normal step is not a featureless Absolute, but the Supermind. I consider that in trying to overshoot, Buddha like Shankara made a mistake, cutting away the dynamic side of the liberation. Therefore there has to be a correction by Kalki.

I was of course dealing with the Ten Avatars as a "parable of the evolution", and only explaining the interpretation we can put on it from that point of view. It was not my own view of the thing that I was giving.

[&]

Too much importance need not be attached to the details about Kalki — they are rather symbolic than an attempt to prophesy details of future history. What is expressed is something that has to come, but it is symbolically indicated, no more.

*

I am seeking to manifest something of the Divine that I am conscious of and feel—I care a damn whether that constitutes me an Avatar or something else. That is not a question which concerns me. By manifestation of course I mean the bringing out and spreading of that Consciousness so that others also may feel and enter into it and live in it.

(CWSA28:472-73,476,478,487,488,489;35:419;SABCL22:408,408-09,412,401-03,26:150)

The Mother on Sri Aurobindo

What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme.

*

Man is the creation of yesterday.

Sri Aurobindo came to announce the creation of tomorrow: the coming of the supramental being.

*

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to announce the manifestation of the supramental world and not merely did he announce this manifestation but embodied also in part the supramental force and showed by example what one must do to prepare oneself for manifesting it. ...

*

In the eternity of becoming, each Avatar is only the announcer, the forerunner of a more perfect realisation.

And yet men have always the tendency to deify the Avatar of the past in opposition to the Avatar of the future.

Now again Sri Aurobindo has come announcing to the world the realisation of tomorrow; and again his message meets with the same opposition as of all those who preceded him.

But tomorrow will prove the truth of what he revealed and his work will be done.

The Mother

(CWM 13: 4, 19-20, 17, 22)

Section II: Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi

The Mother on Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi

Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work. (7 December 1950)

*

When I asked Him (On December 8, 1950) to resuscitate his body, He clearly answered: "I have left this body purposely. I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way."

*

Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary.

*

I was painfully shocked when I heard the translation of the leaflet you are distributing here in the Ashram. I never imagined you could have such a complete lack of understanding, respect and devotion for our Lord who has sacrificed himself totally for us. Sri Aurobindo was not crippled; a few hours before he left his body he rose from his bed and sat for a long time in his armchair, speaking freely to all those

around him. Sri Aurobindo was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality.

And when one cannot understand, the only thing to do is to keep a respectful silence.

*

Q; You spoke of Sri Aurobindo's birth as "eternal" in the history of the universe. What exactly was meant by "eternal"?

The sentence can be understood in four different ways on four ascending planes of consciousness:

1. Physically, the consequence of the birth will be of eternal importance to the world.
2. Mentally, it is a birth that will be eternally remembered in the universal history.
3. Psychically, a birth that recurs for ever from age to age upon earth.
4. Spiritually, the birth of the Eternal upon earth.

The Mother

(CWM 13: 6-10)

(Inscribed on the Samadhi)

To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.

9 December 1950 *The Mother*

The Passing of Sri Aurobindo
— Its Inner Significance and Consequence

— Amal Kiran

"No one can write about my life because it is not on the surface for men to see" – this is what Sri Aurobindo said when the idea of a definitive biography was mooted. There is no doubt that, except perhaps for his brilliant academic career in England and the early phases of his fiery political period in India, his life was too deeply inward for its utmost sense and motive and achievement to be unravelled by a narration of external events supplemented by a psychological commentary. To arrive at some vision of it one would have to catch an inkling of not only the vast mysteries of traditional spiritual realisation but also the dazzling immensities of the new earth-transforming light which he called the Supermind and which he endeavoured for forty years to bring down *in toto* for suffering humanity. As with his life, so too with the phenomenon which the world has reported to be his death. Sri Aurobindo's "dying" cannot but be as inward, as profound as Sri Aurobindo living.

No Yogi dies in the ordinary meaning of the word: his consciousness always exceeds the formula of the physical body, he is beyond and greater than his material sheath even while he inhabits it, and his action on mankind is essentially through his free and ample spirit to which both life and death are small masks of a fully aware immortality in the limitless being of the Divine and the Eternal. All the more inapplicable is the term "death" to the passing of a Master of Yoga like Sri Aurobindo. For, it is well known that the transformative power of the Supermind was at work in the very cells of his body and that it commanded an efficacy physical no less than psychological, to which hundreds of

his disciples can testify because of the wonderful curative impact of it on their own ailments. This efficacy was not confined to his Ashram: telegraphic offices all over India will bear witness to the daily flashing of appeals for help in various illnesses – including those that often defeat medical science – and then messages of thanksgiving for relief and remedy by spiritual means. No, Sri Aurobindo, the Yogi of the Supermind, descending into the outer as well as the inner being and bringing a divine life on earth in addition to the infinite immortality of the Beyond, cannot be looked upon as passing away on account of old age and physical causes. Whatever the purely clinical picture, it must have behind it a significance integral with his highly significant and immeasurably more-than-physical life of spiritual attainment.

That there should be a clinical picture instead of a miraculous vanishing trick is exactly in keeping with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. His Yoga was meant to be a process and a progression of the evolutionary method: it aimed not at a bewildering superimposition of divine qualities which still left the grain of human nature unchanged, but at a spiritually organic luminous growth, an assimilation by nature of supernature, a marvellous and yet no freakish transfiguration, an intense working out within a life-time of what is not foreign to the purpose of terrestrial evolution but its inmost meaning whose unfoldment is in the very logic of things, though that unfoldment may ordinarily take aeons. The evolutionary was always fused with the revolutionary in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of the Supermind and, just as his life's audacities, like those of his art of poetry and prose, were always felicitous, full of ease and aptness, gloriously adapting nature rather than violating it, so too the adventure of his death would be no utter supernormality but carry for all

its profound import and exceptional mode some semblance of the common passage to the stillness and the shadow.

What medical science would try to describe as physical causes are, therefore, far indeed from being any contradiction of the thesis that Sri Aurobindo did not pass away as a result of them. And this thesis, we may now add, is based not only on Sri Aurobindo's special spiritual status but also on a number of remarkable physical facts. Doctors have declared, on the strength of typical non-response to stimuli, that he entered into deep coma in consequence of an extreme uraemic condition following upon a failure of all treatment. As every medical tyro knows, such a state of uraemic coma admits of no return to consciousness. Yet to the surprise of the doctors attending on him, Sri Aurobindo opened his eyes at frequent intervals and asked for a drink or inquired what the time was! This repeated occurrence of the scientifically impossible leads one to believe that the deep uraemic coma was intermixed, as it were, with a very conscious Yogic self-withdrawal from an instrument which was too damaged to be kept for common use but which yet could not quite bar the uncommon will of its master. Here was no brain of mere carbon and iron and phosphorus: here was the subtilised servitor of a mind that had sat on the peaks of God and from there could command response in the midst of all material determinism. Even half an hour before the breathing ceased and the heart stopped beating, Sri Aurobindo looked out from his calm compassionate eyes, spoke the name of the doctor by his side and drank some water. This was the strangest uraemic coma in medical history.

Nor did the extraordinary character of the passing of this Yogi of Yogis end there. In a case certified to be one of complete pervasion of the system by the accumulation

in the blood of body poisons which should be thrown off by the kidneys, the system gets discoloured in a short time, a blackening grows apace and then decomposition sets in. But when there was a consultation of doctors, both French and Indian, two and a half days after the death-certificate had been signed, Sri Aurobindo's body was found to have retained the beautiful white-gold colour that had distinguished it during his life and there was not the slightest trace of decomposition. It was just as it had been at the moment of his passing – 1.26 a. m. on December 5 – and also just as it had been 41 hours later when instead of the scheduled burial the famous announcement was made by the Mother, indefinitely postponing it:

"The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact."

It lay intact for several days in a grandeur of victorious quiet, with thousands upon thousands having *darshan* of it. Only at 5 p. m. on December 9, in a rosewood case lined with silver and satin, it was buried most simply and without any sectarian religious ceremony in a vault specially prepared in the centre of the Ashram courtyard. Even when the body was put into the case, there was neither actual decay nor the odour of death, though marks were present to indicate that the miraculous preservative light had begun to depart. The light may be said to have remained in full for over 90 hours – a period more than double the record time which Lyons' *Medical Jurisprudence* gives of a body keeping undecayed in the climatic conditions of the East.

When during the transition to life's close and even after, in the very thick of death, a challenging lordship is manifested over Matter and the transformative power of the Su-

permind that was ever increasingly Sri Aurobindo's is not denied but paradoxically proved, it is, to say the least, reasonable to see the whole event of his passing as the culmination of a momentous deliberate fight whose implications must be read only by understanding a little the supramental light. But here the question arises: If the fight was deliberate, did he give any signs of its forthcoming? The answer is: Yes. It is indeed true that, though the great illuminating letters to his disciples had not quite ceased nor the fine humour forgotten altogether its leap and flash, nor yet the wide look on the world's movement turned away, he had been for the last couple of years rather reticent about his plans for the future and more and more absorbed in his own inner spiritual work and in literary creation, especially his epic poem *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol*. But through the reticence and the absorption a few hints did glimmer out of a strange and dire possibility he might have to confront in the course of his mission.

Some time in November the predictions of a Gujarati astrologer were read out to him. Their focal points were the years 1950 and 1964. The astrologer wrote: "In 1950, as the sun and the moon are in conjunction and the moon is the master of the twelfth house, there is a chance of Sri Aurobindo's self-undoing." About 1964 he opined: "In that year some mighty miracle of Sri Aurobindo's power will be witnessed. Aged 93, he will withdraw from the world at his own will after completing his mission." On hearing this, Sri Aurobindo raised his hand and half-jocularly said: "Oh, ninety-three!" as if he had found that age too far away for his mission's achievement. With regard to 1950 a disciple remarked that it must be a year of importance, since important things had happened in Sri Aurobindo's life at intervals of 12 years. 1926 was an outstanding landmark in

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual career: it is called the year of assurance of victory and marks practically the beginning of the Ashram with the Mother radiantly presiding over it. In 1938 -12 years after that landmark – Sri Aurobindo passed through a physical crisis by falling and fracturing his thigh-bone. 1950 – with its indication of a possibility of "self-undoing" – makes again a 12 years' lapse. And, though the astrologer took only his forecast of a memorable ninety-third year in Sri Aurobindo's life very seriously, Sri Aurobindo seemed to regard his statements as not quite fantastic. He said: "The man has got hold of some truth." Then he was asked: "Isn't the prediction about your 'self-undoing' this year nonsensical? Surely, you are not going to leave us?" In his grand unhurrying way came the calm counter-query of just one mysterious word: "Why?"

A most surprising word, this, to all who had expected that an unusual longevity as a result of the Supermind's increasing descent was part of Sri Aurobindo's programme. Another surprise was fraught with a strange foreboding joy. To those who looked after him or worked in his room he gave a sign of sudden personal tenderness. Sri Aurobindo was not exactly of a demonstrative nature: he had the subtle kindness as of an all-enveloping ether and though his extreme compassion is evident both in the labour he undertook and in many letters written to his disciples in difficulty, physical expressions of his great paternal attitude were rare. But now for a brief moment there went out to his attendants, to each in a different way and on a different occasion, a distinct outward gesture of affection, as if he had wished them to know before it might be too late his appreciation of their service. The gesture, exceedingly sweet and welcome though it was, appeared to hold vaguely in it the poignancy of a possible leave-taking.

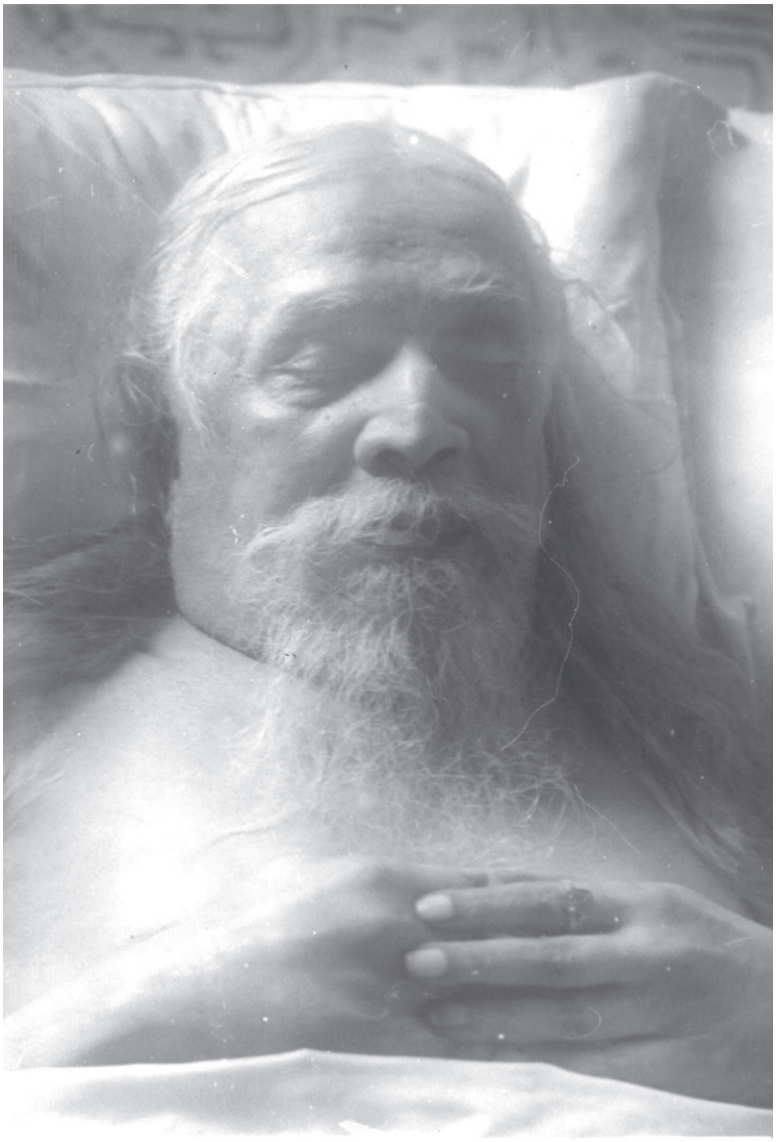
A third surprise may be recorded: a remark which fell oddly on the ear of the disciple whose job it was to take down whatever Sri Aurobindo dictated by way of letter or book. The Master had been busy with his *Savitri* for several years, revising the text he had composed earlier and constantly adding to it, amplifying the significances, enriching the story, extending the symbolism, catching more and more intensely the vision of the superhuman planes of existence and consciousness to which he had access, breathing with an ever-truer thrill the vast rhythms of the movements of the Gods with which he had grown familiar. Out of some unfathomable silence he would draw out golden phrase and apocalyptic line — wait as if he had eternities to throw away — proceed with splendid bursts of occult imagery and revealing description—hark back to expand or amend, with an eye to the tiniest detail of punctuation or sequence, and again press forward with a comprehensive yet meticulous inspiration. A lordly, a leisurely labour was *Savitri*, conceived with something of the antique temperament which rejoiced in massive structures — especially the temperament of the makers of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which take all human life and human thought in their spacious scope and blend the workings of the hidden worlds of Gods and Titans and Demons with the activities of earth. A kind of cosmic sweep was Sri Aurobindo's and he wanted his poem to be a many-sided multi-coloured carving out in word-music of the gigantic secrets of the supramental Yoga. More than fifty thousand lines were thought necessary to house the unique vision and the unparalleled experience. A patience as vast as that vision and that experience characterised always Sri Aurobindo's dealings with this epic. Even the version on which he was engaged was the eleventh or the twelfth. Time without end appeared to be at his disposal

when he sat dictating lines like those about the central figure of the poem:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the Gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple door to things beyond.

But all of a sudden a couple of months before the fateful December 5 Sri Aurobindo startled his scribe by saying: "I must finish *Savitri* soon."

Of course, all this does not fix the very date of his passing nor does it show any desire to depart, but clearly, the grim struggle in which he got involved and which came to a close on that date had loomed already as a likelihood in the near future. And a certain fact about *Savitri* fits in here with the aptest symbolism. Though he strove to finish his epic soon, it just fell short of completion. It had been projected in twelve Books, with an epilogue, but while even the epilogue got written – at least as a general first draft – and the Book of Beginnings, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, the Book of the Divine Mother, the Book of Birth and Quest, the Book of Life, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate and several other Books are either in print or in manuscript, the one single Book which does not exist in any form at all — except for a short piece written a long time ago and meant to be revised and included in a much larger whole — is the Book of Death. Most suggestive is this fact, as if that Book could not be composed until the Grim Spectre had been grappled



A Form that harboured all infinity.

with in actuality and as if Sri Aurobindo had been waiting for some mighty crisis of his own bodily existence before he could launch on this part of his *Legend and Symbol.*

Everything goes to prove that what happened in the small hours of that December day was no purely physical casuality, no fell accident to the seeker of the life divine on earth, but a dreadful gamble freely accepted, an awesome trial undergone for a set purpose, a battle faced in every wounding detail with open eyes and joined with the explicit possibility threatening him of losing in it the most gifted and glorious bodily instrument forged by the manifesting Spirit that is for ever. But the question still stands to be answered: What could be the reason of the perilous experiment? It is doubtful whether any answer expressible by the mere mind can be entirely satisfying. Perhaps none ought to be attempted and we might rest with the conviction that Sri Aurobindo of his own will did what he deemed most necessary for the advancement of his work and we might leave it to the Mother – Sri Aurobindo's partner in that work – to unroll the supreme rationale of the Master's will in the actual developments of the Integral Yoga in the future. However, the Master himself never completely discouraged the effort of the mind to comprehend the Spirit's manifold action. Intellectual formulation of direct inner knowledge or else of intuitive seizures of the Unknown was a thing he fostered, and if by some rapport with his own luminous philosophy we could arrive at a mental glimmer of the Aurobindonian Supermind's intention we should be doing what he himself from beyond our gross senses would perhaps not refuse to sanction.

II

The core of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga is the

dynamic Truth-consciousness that is the Supermind. By "Truth-consciousness" is meant that status and force of the Divine which brings out of the Divine's absolute Transcendence into a perfect manifestation of Self-being and self-becoming the potentialities of the play of the One who is at the same time the Many. This manifestation is a complete harmony in which exist and function the creative truths, the flawless originals, the golden archetypes of all that is in our imperfect cosmos in which the Divine has posited a difficult evolution of matter, life-force and mind – with a soul supporting them – out of a vast Inconscience, a primal darkness set by Him as the nether pole to the transcendent Absolute. Between the two poles and above the evolving earth and below the archetypal Supermind are various occult planes – Subtle Matter, Vitality, Mind, Overmind and, at the back of the first trio, Psyche, – with their beings and movements and there is a complex interaction in the whole system of cosmos on cosmos. All this was known in general to the ancient seers and they saw in man who is the microcosm, a threefold reality concretised into what they termed three sheaths or *shariras* – the gross outer, the subtle inner, the causal higher. The last is the substance of the Supermind, compacted of its creative light of total knowledge, infinite power, immortal bliss. But the ancients did not realise that the earthly evolution is not meant only to release the being into the Cosmic Self and into ever more deep, ever more high poises of consciousness and into some eternity beyond birth and death but also to bring into earth-terms the dynamic modes of the widths, the depths and the heights and ultimately the supreme perfection of the Truth-plane – the *kārana sharira*, the causal body – so that earth-terms themselves may be fulfilled and not merely serve as bright points of departure into the wide and the deep and the high. In

short, the ancients lacked a full and organised possession of the Supermind's purpose and power: the fusion of the supramental light with the inmost soul and the descent of it into mind and life-energy and even the physical body, transforming and divinising them in entirety, are Sri Aurobindo's special discovery and Yoga. With the supramental descent Sri Aurobindo aimed at creating a new humanity enjoying true self-consummation and living divinely in every field, and it is with this aim that he sought to form an initiating double centre for the new humanity by his own supramentalisation and the Mother's.

Supramentalisation involves, among its final elements, freedom from disease, duration of life at will and a change in the functionings of the body – all, of course, as a material expression of the divine nature emerging in the human and not as an outer aggrandisement of an expanding inner egoism. But to compass these final elements which alone would found with utter security a supramental earth-existence, the Yogi has to tackle at last the bed-rock of the Inconscience, the dark basis of the submerged Divine from which evolution seems to issue. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, taking upon themselves as representative pioneers the age-long difficulties of all human nature, have been striking against this bed-rock for the last decade and a half.

"No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy," wrote Sri Aurobindo in 1936 to a disciple and added: "I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it."

In the course of this plunge, as layer after layer of the occult Inconscient is torn open and the supramental light sought to be called down into it, various dreadful possibili-

ties rise up and great inner wounds as well as severe bodily tensions have to be endured. But throughout the fight the Master of the Supermind carries the talisman, as it were, that can ward off the fatal blow. Immense, in spite of the sublimest light within his very body, are his trials and yet he has also the capacity to emerge finally the victor and blaze a path of ultimate triumph for the men who follow him. Thus to emerge had been Sri Aurobindo's plan, so far as the plan can be read through his philosophical writings and his personal letters. Both the plan and the non-egoistic world-wide attitude of an Avatar find voice in a letter of 1935:

"I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others."

Yes, Sri Aurobindo, in his published pronouncements, appears to have envisaged the need and therefore the prospect of himself constituting together with the Mother the starting point of supramental humanity. But in the same pronouncements he leaves also a small margin for a different *denouement*. A letter of 1934 speaks in general about the ways of a vessel of God:

"The Divinity acts according to the consciousness of the Truth above and the *Lila* below and It acts according to the need of the *Lila*, not according to men's ideas of what It should do or should not do."

A clearer hint of unexpected turns in the Divine's dealings is contained in a letter of 1935:

"Why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? What rigid primitive notions

are these about the Divine!"

This suggests that apparent defeat of the Divine's grandest goal could even be a concealed victory, a way precisely to reach that goal with greater swiftness by means of a paradoxical strategy. And, all conditions considered, it is truly such a strategy that seems to have been employed by Sri Aurobindo when to the superficial gaze he succumbed to a renal disorder.

The whole supramental Yoga was indeed like a great general's campaign against forces that had never been combated before by any spiritual figure. In the teeth of every common experience, every posture of human living down the ages, even every articulate spiritual tradition, this Yoga hoped to change the very foundations of Matter and proceeded into an embattled darkness: only a fearless fighter like Sri Aurobindo, only a genius like him of the Spirit militant could have intuited the mighty secret of the epiphany in evolution and planned the transformative onslaught on established nature and moved ahead in the frame of mind that is disclosed in yet another letter of 1935:

"It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense…If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. It is a question between the Divine and myself – whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way to its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption – I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others."

A splendid heroism of selflessness is here, the vividest picture of a warrior Yogi who would take any risk, if thereby he could press closer to his objective – and though the formula is "I conquer or perish" the frame of mind is one that might easily avail itself of a yet more audacious formula: "I perish to conquer." To embrace this formula what would be required is simply the sense that, by sacrificing in a final grapple with the black powers of the Inconscient a wonderful body tinged with supramental light, those powers would be terribly exhausted and the golden godhead above tremendously pulled towards earth and into this body's partner in the Yoga of the Supermind. As soon as the momentous sense would dawn, Sri Aurobindo would be ready – supreme general that he was – to alter his entire scheme of battle, relinquish his whole line of previously prepared forts, abandon the old method of advance, change suddenly his well-plotted direction and, instead of attempting to supramentalise his physical existence in every detail, move imperturbably towards some titanic ambush, cast away the very guard given him by the Supermind and go down fighting to win all in secret, while losing all on the surface.

Nothing except a colossal strategic sacrifice of this kind in order that the physical transformation of the Mother may be immeasurably hastened and rendered absolutely secure and, through it, a divine life on earth for humanity may get rooted and be set aflower – nothing less can explain the passing of Sri Aurobindo. There would also be implied in the holocaust a world-saving action by the sweet power of which Sri Aurobindo speaks in a letter as far back as 1934:

"It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness to the Divine."

We may say that some undreamt of catastrophe would have overwhelmed the world if the vast poison had not been drawn away into the body of this one man whose spiritual consciousness, armed with divine Love, had made him a universalised individual incarnating the Transcendent's Will. And here we may refer again to the fact that the obstacles confronting Sri Aurobindo in his Yoga were not really personal. They were representative of the race and he gladly accepted their retarding perilous load in spite of or perhaps because of his own exceptional gifts and abilities. Apropos a query about some temporary complaint in the Mother's body many years ago, he wrote:

"We have not sought perfection for our own separate sake, but as part of a general change – creating a possibility of perfection for others. That could not have been done without our accepting and facing the difficulties of the realisation and the transformation and overcoming them for ourselves. It has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes – but not yet on the most material part of the physical plane. Till it is done, the fight there continues… The Mother's difficulties are not her own; she bears the difficulties of others and those that are inherent in the general action and work for the transformation. If it had been otherwise, it would be a very different matter."

Obviously, then, whatever sacrifice is made by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother cannot be one imposed on them by personal defects. Theirs the unique *adhars* or vehicles of Yoga which could, if left to themselves, surmount every obstacle. This, in the present context of Sri Aurobindo's departure, means that death is not anything he was obliged to undergo on account of some jack in himself. It is some stupendous crisis of the evolving earth-consciousness – some rebellious clouding upsurge of the divinely attacked Inconscient – that

has been diverted to his own life, concentrated in the mortal risk of the uraemic coma and utilised by the master strategist for an occult advantage to the work he had assumed – the work which was always more important than direct personal consummation.

But it would be of the essence of the sacrifice and the strategy, as well as typically Aurobindonian, that a keenly struggling resistance should be there together with the large and tranquil acceptance. That is why we have said that Sri Aurobindo has gone down fighting. Never to acquiesce in any shortcoming of earth-nature was his motto, for he saw the very secret of evolution to be the manifestation in earth-nature of what superficially looks impossible – the quivering forth of vitality and sensation in seemingly lifeless Matter, the glimmering out of mind and reason in apparently instinctive animality, the all-perfecting revelation of Supermind in ostensibly groping intelligence, stumbling life-force and mortal body. So there never could be for Sri Aurobindo either a surrender to ordinary world-conditions or a flight into peace away from the world. An inviolable timeless peace he had always known ever since those three grand days in Baroda in 1908 when through a complete silencing of the mind the absolute experience of Nirvana, which has been the terminus of so many other Yogas, became his – not as a terminus but only as a base for further conquests. As for surrender, he could surrender to nothing except the Divine. Consequently, he battled for the Supermind's descent till his last breath – calling the immortal Sun of the Spirit down, passionately packing his earthly envelope with the supramental light so much so indeed that he could keep for several days that envelope free from the taint of discolouration and decay. To battle thus in the very moments of the sacrifice was in tune with his whole life-endeavour.

Has he not himself expounded in a letter the technique of triumph in the midst of seeming downfall?

"Even if I foresee an adverse result I must work for the one that I consider should be; for it keeps alive the force, the principle of Truth which I serve and gives it a possibility to triumph hereafter so that it becomes part of the working of the future favourable fate even if the fate of the hour is adverse. "

With these far-seeing phrases of the Master we may close our attempt to elucidate a little the mystery of that look of magnificent meditation with which he lay from early morning of December 5 for more than 111 hours in his simple bed in the room where he had spent over two decades of intense world-work. "Spiritually imperial" – this is the only description fitting the appearance of his body: the heroic countenance with its white beard and its flowing white hair above the massive forehead, its closed quiet eyes and its wide nostrilled aquiline nose and its firm lips whose corners were touched with beatitude, the broad and smooth shoulders, the arms flexed to place on the indomitable chest hand over gentle, artistic yet capable hand, the strong manly waist covered by an ample cloth of gold-bordered silk, even the legs stretched out with an innate kingship reminiscent of their having trod through seventy-nine years with holy feet at once blessing and possessing earth. The atmosphere of the room was vibrant with a sacred power to cleanse and illumine, a power which appeared to emanate from the Master's poise of conquering rest and to invade the bodies of all the watchers with almost a hammering intensity from over their heads as if, in redoubled force because of Sri Aurobindo's selfless physical withdrawal, there came pouring down to humanity the life-transfiguring grace of the Supermind.

And we may add that somehow the personal presence itself of Sri Aurobindo grew intenser. He who had so long kept to a room for the sake of concentratedly hastening the Yogic process of transformation – the wonderful bliss and dynamics of which the Mother had been canalising by her physical nearness to the disciples – he by setting aside his most exterior sheath broke out into a new intimacy with his followers and took them even more directly into his immense being. But it would hardly do justice to that being if we thought of it as merely a pervading greatness. Behind the material envelope are other organised vehicles – subtle and causal – and Sri Aurobindo had brought the remote causal effectively into the proximate subtle and was pressing it into the outer sheath at the time of his strategic sacrifice. To quote again his words, "The transformation has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes." This means that he held the Supermind embodied in his subtle *sharira* and that he was under no occult necessity, no law of subtle Nature, to give up the latter for the purpose of returning to some plane of the soul's rest before being reborn with a new subtle body as well as a new gross one. Sri Aurobindo, at the hour of his physical withdrawal, was in a position to do much more than be the cosmic and transcendent Purusha that his supramental Yoga had made his incarnate personality. He could actually be that Purusha active in an indissoluble subtle body at once divine and human, in a far more direct constant touch with the material world than could the forms which mystics have visioned of past Rishis and Prophets and Avatars. In a most special sense, therefore, Sri Aurobindo the marvellously gifted and gracious person who was our Guru and whom we loved is still at work and a concrete truth is expressed by the Mother when she says: "To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo, who is here with us

conscious and alive." The same concrete truth is ingemmed in the beautiful message of December 7, which she delivered out of her depths where she and Sri Aurobindo are one:

"Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth-atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one Will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy Sublime Work."

So the work goes on, the Mother fronting the future, with the Master by her side in subtle embodiment. And for those who have faith in the work's fulfilment and who understand what that would be, there is a hope that sees the future pregnant with a particular most heart-soothing possibility. Sri Aurobindo has written in connection with the time when the Supermind's descent into flesh and blood will be complete:

"In the theory of the occultists and in the gradation of the ranges and planes of our being which Yoga-knowledge outlines for us there is not only a subtle physical force but a subtle physical Matter intervening between life and gross Matter and to create in this subtle physical substance and precipitate the forms thus made into our grosser materiality is feasible. It should be possible and it is believed to be possible for an object formed in this subtle physical substance to make a transit from its subtlety into the state of gross Matter directly by the intervention of an occult force and process whether with or even without the assistance or intervention of some gross material procedure. A soul wish-

ing to enter into a body or form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body: inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functionings of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge in a progressive evolution to a totally transformed existence both of life and form in a divinised earth-nature."

These words hold out the prospect that Sri Aurobindo who has already a divinised subtle physical sheath may employ the supramental mode of manifestation for the purpose of presiding in the domain of Matter itself over the new humanity which the Mother will initiate. In that dawn of God's gold the Mother will be the first being to achieve the divine body by a progression through a body born in the natural manner, while through the support of her achievement Sri Aurobindo may be the first being to put on the physical vesture of transformation by a projection of substance and shape from supernature. Nothing, of course, is certain about what Sri Aurobindo may will to do, but the possibility we have figured is not out of accord with all that we have glimpsed of a quenchless and victorious light beyond the human in the very event which strikes the surface eye of the aspiring world as a universal sunset – the passing of Sri Aurobindo.

— Amal Kiran

(*The Passing of Sri Aurobindo,* Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, pp. 1-23)

Appendix:

Conquest of Death

An Excerpt from the Preface written by Manoj Das for the book "To Thee Our Infinite Gratitude"

The unremitting endeavour of man to expunge death from his destiny made startling progress in the twentieth century so far as physical science is concerned. To cite an example that unerringly testifies to this statement, a noted medical researcher and author, Alvin Silverstein, dedicated his significant thesis *Conquest of Death* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) "To our generation — the first Emortals" and said in conclusion, "The 1980s will be the Decade of the Scientific Pay-offs. The impressive decline in the incidence and mortality of heart disease that has already begun to gather momentum will accelerate. Cancer deaths will dip and then plunge. Dramatic progress in aging will bring new youth for the millions. The close of the decade will bring a virtual end to disease and a welcome reduction of pain and suffering ... The heart disease rate has been falling annually since the early fifties. The cancer death rate may have already turned down and will continue to do so at an accelerated pace in the years ahead. During the next decade, further advances will bring a striking improvement of the odds. If you survive the next ten years, you may live on indefinitely in youth and vigour — you may become emortal." In other words, if not immortal, at least not obliged to die.

No more than a year or so had passed when this pleasant forecast was shattered by the appearance on the horizon of that deadly cloud soon to spread and darken the entire global sky— AIDS.

And that brings to mind what Sri Aurobindo wrote in a footnote to the chapter entitled "Rebirth and Other Worlds" in *The Life Divine* as if in anticipation of such a development:

> Even if Science — physical Science or occult Science — were to discover the necessary conditions or means for an indefinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being.

Though just a footnote, it contains an essential truth: it is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being that warrants death. We can interpret this profound statement according to the meagre light we have been able to absorb from the vision the Master has unfolded before us. The situation is marked by a paradox: there is no possibility of an indefinite physical survival unless the body has become an instrument fit enough to contain a spirit that aspires to grow. On the other hand, the body cannot become worthy of that process without the intervention of some new transforming consciousness. We the students of Sri Aurobindo-lore know that the Master was engrossed in a hitherto unexplored possibility and devoted his mighty yogic power to resolve the paradox and bring down and establish that transforming power in the physical. Any claim to understand that divine process the Master and the Mother followed and the success they obtained may be presumptuous on our part.

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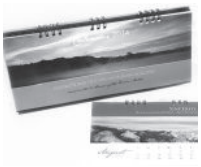
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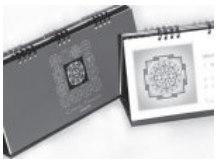
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