

**FLOWERS OF  
THE MOTHER'S SYMBOL**  
A RENAISSANCE JOURNAL OFFERING

**SHEEBA NAAZ**

# Flowers of the Mother's Symbol

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(with a chapter on 'Peace' by Chitra Kolluru)

Introduction and Editing by Beloo Mehra

2024



*Sri Anubhavo Society*

**AUROPUBLICATIONS**

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

# **Flowers of the Mother's Symbol**

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# INTRODUCTION

“Life must blossom like a flower offering itself  
to the Divine.”

~ The Mother, CWM, 14:98

From August 2021 to July 2022, *Renaissance*, the online journal of Sri Aurobindo Society, dedicated 12 issues to exploring several dimensions of the Twelve Attributes of the Mother’s Symbol. This project was taken as an offering towards the celebration of Sri Aurobindo’s 150th birth anniversary and 75th anniversary of India’s political independence. Sri Aurobindo has spoken of these 12 attributes as necessary for the full manifestation of the Mother’s Work:

Sincerity | Humility | Gratitude | Perseverance | Aspiration |  
Receptivity | Progress | Courage | Goodness | Generosity | Equality |  
Peace

One of the ways in which these attributes were explored was through the 12 flowers corresponding to each of them. Entering into inner contact with the deepest being of the flower, the Mother has identified its inner truth, the unique aspect of Nature it represents or emanates through its colour, form, fragrance, texture and beauty. Thus she has given spiritual names to nearly 900 flowers revealing their deepest aspiration.



The Mother tells us that by cultivating a conscious and intimate relationship with flowers, one can awaken true consciousness within and experience communion with the Divine. Growing in contact with flowers is also a part of Integral Yoga since the Mother used flowers as a help in sadhana, teaching us how to master and transform our lower nature and realise the highest possibilities that await us. Love of flowers can help us find our own psychic being, the Divine presence within us.

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“I have noticed a first rudiment of the psychic presence and vibration in vegetable life, and truly this blossoming one calls a flower is the first manifestation of the psychic presence.”

~ The Mother, CWM, Vol. 4, p. 166

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## **Use of Flowers by the Mother**

How do we open ourselves more and more to the Light and Force of the Divine Shakti? How do we develop within us a greater peace and calm and receptivity to allow this Light and Force to work within? The Great Masters everywhere have emphasised several ways; foremost among them are: sincere and patient one-pointed aspiration, genuine humility, unyielding faith and complete trust in the Divine, elimination of ego-insistence in all forms, and self-offering and surrender to the Divine.

Eliminating ego-insistence, of course, takes immense *tapasyā*. But becoming more conscious when we resist something because of our egos can gradually help us become more open. We close ourselves to the Force when we fill ourselves tightly with ego and its countless demands. We carry too much burden and weight of our egos which leaves little open space within for the Light and Force from Above to enter. To be humble, sincere and receptive – this is the key. Like a flower. Opening itself to the Light above and receiving the Force to help grow and spread its self-existent beauty and joy, even when no one is looking.

We know from the Mother's own accounts that she had deep kinship with the world of plants and flowers. She had a deep love towards the natural world, and she has spoken of how the trees, flowers and vegetables even communicated with her in their language. She brought this deep, inner communion she had with the world of flowers in her approach to the inner work she did for the progress of *sādhakas* at Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Flowers are extremely receptive, said the Mother. She added,

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“All the flowers to which I have given a significance receive exactly the force I put into them and transmit it. People don't always receive it because most of the time they are less receptive than the flower, and they waste the force that has been put in it through their unconsciousness and lack of receptivity. But the force is there, and the flower receives it wonderfully.”

~ CWM, Vol. 6, p. 229

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The Mother said that on the material plane, flowers are most open to the influence of the Divine Shakti, because flowers represent the soul-element in the plant kingdom and the pure psychic consciousness is instinctive to a flower. This is why when she had to transmit a certain state of consciousness to a *sādhaka*, she would often do it through a flower. She would give them a specific flower which she said carried a specific spiritual force or vibration. She explained that depending on one's inner receptivity, one would be easily able to absorb the message she put in the flowers. She also said that when an aspirant offers flowers to the Divine, his or her state of consciousness also

determines the outer condition of the flowers. A purer and truer inner aspiration will be expressed through flower-offerings that remain fresh for a longer time. (CWM, Vol. 3, p. 132)

For many aspirants on the path of Integral Yoga working with flowers in the light of their spiritual significances as given by the Mother has been an important practice of their sadhana. Whether it is arranging the flowers in a specific pattern, growing them and looking after them, or simply gathering them for other uses – many people have been practicing their inner sadhana through their outer work with flowers. The right attitude, as the Mother reminds us, is to cultivate within all the qualities that flowers represent – openness, frankness, equality, generosity and gentleness.

It is interesting to note that the ‘spiritual significance of flowers’ has also been researched and experimented upon by thousands of aspirants. The experiments include not only studying the effect of these flower-powers on the emotional or mental well-being but also in curing several physical ailments. The results indicate that the Mother through her work with the flowers in the Ashram has indeed given to the world another unique approach to concentrate and apply the immense healing powers of Prakriti, Mother Nature. One can speak of it as another new form given to the ancient Tantric approach to master the powers of Nature.

## **Twelve Flowers in *Renaissance***

For the 12 issues of *Renaissance* during 2021-2022, as we explored the 12 qualities of the Mother’s Symbol, we decided to also highlight the 12 flowers associated with each quality. A yogasana teacher and an aspirant from Chennai, Sheeba Naaz joined us in this journey and volunteered to write 12 articles. Towards the end of the year, due to a

personal circumstance she was unable to write the article related to the flower of Peace. Another aspirant on the path of Integral Yoga, Chitra Kolluru jumped in to help and write a reflective piece on Peace.

The present volume compiles all these 12 articles and helps us deepen our personal understanding of and aspiration to practice these soul-qualities through contemplating on 12 different flowers. We hope it motivates the sincere reader to realise the inner truth of these flowers by loving them and growing in contact with them, and aspire in a more perfect and luminous sense to be like a flower – open, frank, equal, generous and gentle.

Beloo Mehra

Pondicherry, 2024



# **SINCERITY**

**Of the Michaelmas Daisy, Winters and Sincerity**





**SINCERITY**

Aster amellus  
Italian aster

Simple Sincerity  
The beginning of all progress.

**Fear not,  
your sincerity is your safeguard.**

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 66)



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I begin with a poem I remember reading a long time back:

### **THE MICHAELMAS DAISY**

Last smile of the departing year,  
Thy sister sweets are flown;  
Thy pensive wreath is far more dear,  
From blooming thus alone.

Thy tender blush, thy simple frame,  
Unnoticed might have past;  
But now thou contest with softer claim,  
The loveliest and the last.

Sweet are the charms in thee we find,  
Emblem of hope's gay wing;  
'Tis thine to call past bloom to mind,  
To promise future spring.

An English poet, Letitia Elizabeth Landon wrote the poem "The Michaelmas Daisy" in the year 1820 for the *Literary Gazette*. The poem is about a flower named *Aster Amellus*, also called as Michaelmas daisy because it blooms during the Christian feast of St. Michael, an archangel and leader of heavenly armies and one who protects against the hostile forces. Because Michaelmas falls near autumnal equinox, it is associated in the northern hemisphere with the beginning of autumn, indicating farewell to a productive year and getting ready for crossing over the winter for a new beginning. Perhaps this is how the tradition started of giving a Michaelmas daisy to a loved one when saying farewell.

It is not surprising that the same flower symbolises Sincerity, one of the most important soul-qualities that the Mother says we must

cultivate if we aspire to unite with the Divine. Sincerity begins with undeniable faith, sees us through the end, helps us achieve our goal, protecting us from the wickedness of this material world – a work similar to that of St. Michael.

It is easier said than done and the path is strewn with thorns, doubts and despair. But a *sādhaka* who has laid a strong foundation of sincerity will not falter. To be sincere is to be pure, but it is not a moralistic purity. It is the purity of intention, thought and deed. Sincerity means being open to only the influence of the Divine, Sri Aurobindo explains.

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“Desire nothing but the purity, force, light, wideness, calm, Ananda of the divine consciousness and its insistence to transform and perfect your mind, life and body.”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 32: 8)

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Only Divine influence can bring complete purity of the heart. And unless the heart is filled with purity, sincerity is difficult to achieve. Isn't it interesting that in some ancient cultures the odour emanating from burning of the aster flower was used to ward off serpents, evil spirits and impure minds?

Purity of heart is what makes one exude genuineness that is undeniable. No wonder Hathayoga begins with *shat kriyas* or cleansing practices that not only cleanse our physical body but also our subtle, emotional, vital and spiritual bodies.

For one who is on the path of yoga, ‘sincerity with intensity’ is a prerequisite. The Mother says that sincerity of a much higher magnitude is needed on the path to self-realisation. It is not enough to

be sincere in mind and body alone, one has to be sincere in every fibre and every feeling and emotion of one's heart. This "Integral Sincerity" is the *sine quo non* for the supramental transformation which is the object of Integral Yoga. Patanjali also talks about the same intensity in his *sutra* in Samadhi Pada, "*Tivra samveganam aasannah*" which means that one with intense sincerity is near one's goal.

One might say that sincerity is always intense. But digging deep we may realise that sincerity can be intense but intensity is not necessarily always sincere and pure. Steadfast faith, intensity, sincerity and purity of heart bring the hope and promise to a spiritual aspirant that one day he will unite with the Divine, no matter how arduous or long the path.

Asters are the last flowers to disappear in the wild before the harsh winters set in. It is as if they are telling us – do not worry, we will all be fine and spring shall soon return. They instil a hope for a new beginning and remind us to stay sincere along the journey. The American poet, Robert Frost, known for his poetic descriptions of the countryside, describes a solitary walk through a beautiful sombre landscape in his famous poem, "A Late Walk." Towards the end of the poem, he speaks of the Aster flower as an emblem of hope to see us through the harsh winters.

I end not far from my going forth  
By picking the faded blue  
Of the last remaining Aster flower  
To carry again to you.

Sincerity is what enables us to persevere. As the Mother reminds us, "Fear not, your sincerity is your safeguard." (CWM, 14: 66)

# **HUMILITY**

## **Humility in a Dropseed**



# HUMILITY

Agrostis nebulosa  
Dropseed

Humility: Adorable in its simplicity

**Modesty is satisfied with its own  
charm and does not draw  
attention to itself.**

**(The Mother, CWM, 14: 152)**



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Humility is commonly understood to mean a lack of pride; a humble person is expected to feel that he or she is of no special importance, no better than others in any way. No wonder that in this day and age, humility has become one of the most undesirable qualities, almost equated to being poor or unsuccessful. “When you own it, you show it” is the modern mantra. Maybe it is time to understand that humility is not about negating one’s ego but taming it.

Nature has its unique ways of helping us cultivate those qualities that may otherwise be ignored. How often do we pause and admire the prairie dropseed grass with its beautiful yet humble display of tiny florets? If there is a rose bush nearby, the dropseed would simply be invisible to our eyes. But what we don’t realise is that the beauty of the rose is always enhanced by the display of humble grass in the background. Only from a place of humbleness can one enhance the beauty of his surroundings. The light from within shines forth through the garb of humble attitude.

Dropseed is an annual grass, with erect airy panicles of branching spikelets bearing minute flowers that open pale greenish white and change to maroon as they mature. The Mother gave this flower the spiritual significance: Humility, adorable in its simplicity.

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“True humility is humility before the divine – that is, the precise, exact, living in the sense that one is nothing, can do nothing, understand nothing without the divine, that even if one is an exceptionally intelligent and capable person, one is nothing in comparison with the divine consciousness.”

(The Mother, CWM, 5: 45)

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I am reminded of an old story about a wise humble sage living in solitude in a faraway island. People spoke about his virtues and vast knowledge, and his name spread far and wide. It reached the ears of a renowned king who was so inspired that he wanted to visit and learn from the sage.

The king started his journey on a boat accompanied by his ministers and finally reached the island. The sage welcomed him to his simple abode but had nothing much to offer him. The king asked the sage if he could teach him the scriptures and mantras that had made him so popular. The sage immediately obliged and started to teach him what he knew.

The king was devastated when he heard the sage's chanting of mantras. He was himself a highly scholarly man and had read most of what the sage was sharing with him. He, in fact, felt sorry for the old sage and told him that his chanting of the mantras was all wrong and that he also needed to change his meditation practice or else he would be in serious trouble. The sage was petrified, and immediately asked the king to teach him the proper ways so that he would not be in trouble. The king gladly agreed to help the sage.

After teaching the sage how to chant properly, how to meditate and several other things, the king was finally ready to leave. He bid goodbye to the sage and sailed off in his boat. About a few miles into the ocean, the king's ministers saw something or someone running towards the boat. They were horrified and informed the king. The king came out of his private chamber to see what the ruckus was about. Lo and behold, it was the sage running on water, huffing and puffing.

The king was still in a state of shock when the sage finally reached the boat and exclaimed, "Sorry, my King, but I just forgot the mantra you taught me. Can you please repeat it once again!"

The king could not utter a word, his eyes continuously staring at this barefooted old man so far away into the ocean wearing just a small robe! He realised his mistake and said, “Sorry sir, I think what you were chanting was the right mantra and the right way, it is I who has to change his ways.”

Looking confused, the sage retreated back to his abode.

No matter what spiritual or religious practice we pursue, if it is not infused with a pure sense of humility, grace does not descend upon us. The sage is the humble dropseed shining his light upon the king, the rose, eventually bringing a magical transformation in him.

Humility is underrated as a quality today because the dictionary defines and accentuates it as low self-regard and a sense of unworthiness. But in its truest sense, humility is neither having pride, haughtiness or narcissistic qualities nor is it indulgence in self-depreciation. It is actually about attaining a perfect balance, an energetic vitality that displays a healthy ego which is a sure sign of self-esteem.

Psychologists have seldom found correlation between high self-esteem and accomplishments. Often people with successful careers, extraordinary looks or loads of money also exhibit signs of low self-esteem. On the other hand, the ones with healthier self-esteem may not own much, have fewer expectations in life and simply give themselves the permission to be humble with whatever they own and achieve. They also take good care of themselves and others in their lives and overall have a positive approach to life.

The second chapter of Yogasutra of Patanjali, sadhana pada, tells us of the yogic action a *sādhaka* pursues to reach his spiritual goal – “*tapahsvādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni kriyāyogaḥ*” (2:1). The three



requisites of this action are austerity or intense spiritual effort with enthusiasm (*tapas*), self-study and study of scriptures (*svādhyāya*) and surrender to the Supreme, the Divine with humility (*ishwara pranidhāna*).

Enthusiasm and austerity provide the intense heat and energy needed to remove obstacles and impurities in life in order to move forward. But this enthusiasm must always be accompanied by clear intelligence or viveka which is the result of study of wisdom texts or *svādhyāya*. These two combined is a perfect formula for a forward march towards a perfect life where neither the truth of matter nor the truth of spirit is denied.

But then Patanjali reminds us, if these two are not infused with humility and surrender towards the divine, our efforts would be futile. To release the illusion of control is to cultivate humility. There are innumerable things that are beyond our control and relinquishing the need for control and surrendering to that unknown is the essence of humility.

When we cultivate humility and modesty, we encourage ourselves to be patient and honest. We forgive ourselves for the mistakes we make and this in turn helps us appreciate ourselves and the world at large. Through humility all our internal dialogues, commentaries and predilections subside (called as *nirodha* in Yogasutra). This, in turn, helps us accept life as it is and arrive at a state of harmony.

# **GRATITUDE**

## **Morning Glory and the Varied Colours of Gratitude**





*Ipomoea carnea*

It is you who open all the closed doors and  
allow the saving Grace to enter.

**Gratitude: A humble recognition of  
all that the divine has done and is  
doing for you.**

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 154)



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The first time I planted this creeper, I was in awe of its beauty. The flowers of Ipomea, also known as pink morning glory cannot be missed. They bloom profusely throughout the year and have a centre that almost draws you in. If you stare at it long enough, you will be mesmerised by its beauty. It's almost as if you step into the flow of universal energy, a dance of gratitude that makes us experience heaven on earth.

When I first heard about the spiritual significance of flowers as given by the Mother and that the spiritual significance of this Ipomea flower is Gratitude, I was almost in tears. It reminded me of that day from decades ago. Back then as a budding teacher of Yogasana, I was always looking for themes and ideas for my classes. That particular day I picked a basket full of morning glory and placed a flower in front of every mat. You see, the theme I had chosen was gratitude! What a coincidence and how did I even know!

Perhaps intuitively we do sense a language that exists within nature and that goes beyond our ordinary mental or rational understanding. The Mother wants us to "[be like a flower](#)," which also means to be open and frank: "it hides nothing of its beauty. It lets it emerge freely, openly, frankly. What is within, what is in its depths, it brings out so that all can see it." Perhaps that day I was open enough to see gratitude flow out from within the depths of the Morning Glory flowers.

For me, the very understanding of the word gratitude has evolved over the years. The journey of life allows our soul to ascend and access higher levels of inner organisation and complexity. And with each new realisation, a shift in perception occurs which in turn transforms the way we define gratitude.

There was a time when I used to define gratitude in terms of material possessions, the comfort of luxury, having a healthy body, job

security, and such things. While these are wonderful reasons to be grateful for, as we grow and inwardly evolve in our life-journey, newer vistas of understanding and knowledge open for us, and with a shift in priorities, our sense of gratitude also deepens with the expansion of consciousness. In brief, we begin to realise that gratitude is not a response or reaction but a state of the mind.

Gratitude is the most magical of all attitudes, because it has the capacity to make us feel positive and hopeful under any circumstance. With a heart full of gratitude every moment of our life becomes a song full of praise – this feeling can be truly life changing.

Sometimes we think that happiness is what makes us feel grateful; on the contrary it is gratefulness that makes us happy. When we are grateful, we get a clear sense of our past, our today becomes peaceful and we create a positive vision for our future.

### Gratitude Stories

I have heard many stories about gratitude. But the one that truly touched my heart is a small incident involving the Mother and her handkerchief. Once a *sādhikā* at Sri Aurobindo Ashram who used to stitch clothes for the Mother was given a small handkerchief to darn. The disciple came back and told Datta (Mother's companion at the time) that though she had somehow managed to darn the handkerchief, it was getting seriously hard to repair as it had become quite old. That evening, Datta while placing the handkerchief near the Mother's bedside said that it was perhaps time to throw it away. Hearing this, the Mother jumped out of her bed and took the handkerchief and said – how can you throw something that has served you for so long?

This act of gratitude may sound trivial for many in our modern world. We throw away clothes even before they are worn a few times, leave alone getting torn. For many in today's world of consumerism, this may even sound horrendous. But a part of me feels that if we give gratitude a serious thought and reflect upon it, we may find a sincere solution to many of our problems.

When we are truly grateful, we turn a meal into a feast and a stranger into a friend, and with that positive outlook, we create more abundance in life. Gratitude is a state of mind – one for which we should always strive.

Gratitude is a dance we experience that makes our life rich and colourful just like a rainbow. The colours of gratitude usually play out in so many different ways. When my neighbour explains how she got back to her feet after she lost her only son in a motorbike accident, that's gratitude which fills her eyes with tears. She runs a small organisation today that helps other women who lost their children, bounce back and carry on with their lives.

Another colour of gratitude is seen in my uncle's animated version of his story from the war zone in Iran. The captain of the ship was hit by a splinter from a bomb which cut his throat, and he took his last breath in my uncle's arms. As the ship's vice-captain, my uncle had the honour of giving the last sip of water to the man he adored, and he remains ever so grateful for that.

I see another colour when I think of my student whose husband lay in the hospital with a brain tumour, and not knowing what to do, she completely surrendered to some higher power. Her surrender itself became an expression of her gratitude for all that the Divine was doing. It was that gratitude which helped her become a strong, mature entrepreneur that she is today.

Not all stories are sad. When I last met an old friend over a cup of coffee, she told me about how grateful she was for winning a lottery. And last year during the pandemic when she and her husband had both lost their jobs in Dubai, it was the lottery money that helped them bounce back.

How colourful gratitude can be! The Mother's voice does ring a bell – "Be grateful for all ordeals, they are the shortest way to the divine." (CWM, 14: 225)

The day I had plucked morning glories for my class, a small poem was also born within, perhaps inspired by the divine vision of the blooms. I close this piece with those lines:

Sun Shines, a new dawn  
With a cup of tea, my feet on the lawn  
Zen time, a final yawn  
Before my day begins, my mind is drawn  
A wave of calm, like a soothing balm  
Warmth of the cup, in my palm  
At that moment, do my eyes fall upon  
Pink morning glories, in burgeon  
A sense of gratitude, cascades my horizon  
Can I just freeze this enchanting dawn?

But then, Life has to move on  
Life has to move on;  
So, I thank the Morning Glory to bloom again  
And beyond,  
As an orison  
As a benison  
So that I can be Grateful every single day!

# **PERSEVERANCE**

**The Little Clock Calendula, ‘Herb of the Sun’**







# PERSEVERANCE

Calendula Officinalis

The decision to go to the very end.

**Perseverance is  
patience in action.**

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 162)



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Calendula flower (*Calendula Officinalis*), commonly known as Pot Marigold, is more than a thousand-year-old flower variety. Later the flowers named *Tagates Patula* and *Tagates Erecta* also came to be known by the common name marigold (French Marigold and African Marigold, respectively) because of similar looking flowers. But it is important to note that calendula or the pot marigold is a different genus, has a different flower structure, folklore and history. Known as the “herb of the sun,” calendula is a sacred plant for Hindus in India, its flowers used extensively in various auspicious ceremonies. The flowers have been particularly associated with Lord Ganesha. But due to close similarity with the French and African marigolds, the other two marigold varieties are now more commonly seen in puja and other Hindu rituals and ceremonies.

### What’s in a Name?

The scientific name, Calendula, has a Roman history. ‘Calends’ (or Kalends, more precisely) was the first day of each Roman lunar month. The word ‘calendula’, chosen for the plant by Linnaeus in the year 1750, was a diminutive form of the word ‘calends’. As per the Oxford English dictionary, the word calendula is derived from ‘calendulae’, meaning a little calendar, a little clock or little weather.

But why did the Romans choose to name this flower after the first day of the month? It is because these flowers bloomed exactly like the clockwork, blooming especially on the first day of the month. Also, they open their petals around the sunrise and close by the sunset. Linnaeus must have been an ardent gardener to notice this! Nevertheless, the key point here is the clock-work like rhythm of these flowers and their close relation with time and regularity.

No wonder the deeper vibration of the calendula flower which the Mother contacted inwardly is that of Perseverance! A soul-quality that is all about patience and endurance over a long period of time.

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“Perseverance is patience in action.”

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 162)

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Life is such that all of us face obstacles and hardships at some point or another. This is true of personal and professional life. But when we give ourselves time and work diligently with patience, wisdom and cheerfulness, we persist and with Divine grace also meet the goals we set for ourselves. Perhaps that’s why Calendula flowers are offered to Lord Ganesh before starting something new, to seek his blessings for the patience and perseverance we will need to work through the obstacles without faltering.

The Mother’s advice that we meditate upon flowers and cultivate a deeper connection with their beauty makes perfect sense because it helps us gradually absorb the deeper vibration and quality that different flowers symbolise and express. For example, an interesting fact about Calendula is that these marigolds are edible unlike the other varieties of marigolds. When used as medicinal herbs, they help reduce inflammation and increase clarity. And we would all agree that without clarity, one is not able to persevere on one’s path.

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“It is by persevering that one conquers difficulties, not by running away from them. One who perseveres is sure to triumph. Victory goes to the most enduring. Always do

your best and the Lord will take care of the results.

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 163)

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## Harmonising the Inner and Outer

Most success stories – whether in professional or economic or social spheres – are about grit, determination and endurance. Life offers us opportunities and paths – some we choose, and others are chosen for us by other forces. Sometimes we are blessed with right opportunities at the right moment in our life.

But to transform those opportunities into real success requires immense courage, steadfastness and a great deal of perseverance to work our way through difficulties on the way. One needs to have a warrior-like attitude to face the challenges of life. This is generally the story of all those who have been trailblazers in any way.

But it is important to understand that through all these life experiences and challenges, our evolutionary progress in life generally happens at two levels. Our ancients spoke of these two evolutionary levels as two different kinds of knowledge. One is at an exoteric level, also known as *apara vidya* in Indian spiritual tradition; and the other is esoteric knowledge or *para vidya*.

Exoteric knowledge is the objective knowledge of the outer world and life; Sri Aurobindo speaks of it as knowledge of the Multiplicity. But esoteric knowledge or *para vidya* is subjective knowledge which leads us to a deeper awareness of Self and opens the door to spiritual experiences. Sri Aurobindo speaks of it as knowledge of the One.

Pursuing only the path of exoteric knowledge one may at some point recognise a Divine entity that is outside of self, whereas an exclusive pursuit of the esoteric leads one to discover and connect with the Divine within us. Both types of knowledge are necessary – one may lead us towards our external goal in life while the other will bring us closer to our inner truth.

Even though the two may seem quite opposed to each other, they are closely linked. Without the esoteric knowledge, the exoteric is like a mirage or an illusion that is somewhat unreal. No wonder many people who attain great heights of success in corporate or professional lives end up with a sense of void and meaninglessness. That is because of the wide disconnect between their external and internal worlds.

### Persevere for Equanimity and Harmony

While speaking of the spiritual significance of flowers, the Mother often reminds of a close relation between the external and internal worlds, which is the secret towards complete satisfaction and harmony. When contemplating upon perseverance or any of the other 12 attributes or soul-qualities we must cultivate as part of our inner journey to become fit instruments for the Mother's divine work in the world, we cannot ignore to consider this relation between the external and internal aspects.

This was pointed to me by my Yogasana teacher many years ago. It so happened that once my husband, after promising me that I would accompany him on his business trip to Belgium, couldn't keep his promise because of some change of plans. And I was really disappointed and brooded over this for a few days. My teacher noticed my mood and asked me if something was the matter with me.

Reluctantly, I told him the reason. He smiled and recited a shloka from Bhagavad Gita.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय ।  
सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥2.48॥

At that point of time, I practiced Yogasana only for physical reasons and my goal was one day to become a yoga teacher. Little did I realise that the entire practice of Yogasana is to reach a place of *samatvam* or inner equilibrium, also known as equanimity. This one shloka made me perceive my goal with perfect clarity.

I was a highly sensitive and an emotionally challenged person, easily disturbed and anxious most of the time. Once the clarity came and I realised my inner, truer goal in life, things started to change. My whole journey of yoga became my practice to gain emotional stability. And believe me, it has been a very hard journey. To persevere in the external world is easier when compared to persevering in the internal world. It requires changing our entire habitual pattern of belief system and it is never instantaneous.

The path of this internal journey was new and alien. But once I stepped in, patience and time were the only two attributes that gave me strength to persevere. To reach a place of emotional stability is not easy and it took me years to understand through deep study of books, attending *satsangs* and learning from different mentors, philosophers and teachers.

Many years later I not only became a Yogasana teacher but also reached a state of mental equilibrium, which has brought deep joy and harmony to my existence.

## Coda

Funny that as I write this, my daughter's wedding just got over in Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada. I could not attend the wedding because of delay in my visa formalities due to the pandemic. Many friends felt uncomfortable in calling me or writing to me with their good wishes, thinking that I might be devastated and sad due to not being there for the wedding.

But the fact is that what I experienced during those few days around the wedding was a great sense of joy; I did not feel disappointed or sad. I even felt that it all happened this way for some greater good. I can humbly say that this experience has made me realise that all my hard work and perseverance in the practice of yoga has paid me off with good result!

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“What you are not able to do today, you will achieve tomorrow. Persevere and you shall conquer.”

(The Mother, CWM, 14:163)

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# **ASPIRATION**

**Parijat, the Kalpavriksha**





# ASPIRATION



Nyctanthes Arbor-Tristis

Innumerable,  
obstinate, repeating  
itself tirelessly.

**Aspiration is the dynamic push  
of your whole nature behind the  
resolution to reach the Divine.**

(The Mother, CWM, 3: 168)



[renaissance.aurosociety.org](http://renaissance.aurosociety.org)

Parijat (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) is a night flowering jasmine that is native to only southern and south-eastern Asia. It is a pretty unique tree in the sense it never fruits and its heavenly-fragrant flowers usually drop off as soon as the sun-rays strike them.

Parijat (also written as Pārijat) tree finds special mention in many Hindu scriptures such as the Bhāgavata Purāna, the Mahābhārata and the Vishnu Purāna. This tree is often referred to as one of the Kalpavriksha or Kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling trees of divine origin – a belief also common in Jain, Sikh and Buddhist traditions.

### Birth of the Parijat

The legends say that Parijat tree emerged during the cosmic churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan) and along with the divine cow, Kamadhenu reached the paradise of Indra, the king of Gods. So, how did it land up on our Mother Earth? We find the answer in another story which is about Lord Krishna and his two wives, Rukmini and Satyabhama.

One day Devarishi Narada, the sage who frequently travelled between the *deva-loka* and *prithvi-loka* and also well-known for churning confusion and chaos, went to Sri Krishna's palace in Dwarka and offered him a few Parijat flowers. Krishna gave the flowers to Rukmini, his older queen, who was present there.

Not the one to be sitting quiet, the sage then visited the younger queen Satyabhama's palace. He told her about the heavenly Parijat flowers which he had offered to Sri Krishna who then gave them to Queen Rukmini. Envy and rage filled Satyabhama – as Narada suggested that perhaps Rukmini was Krishna's special favourite. As if to stoke the fire a bit more, he also planted an idea in Satyabhama's mind that perhaps she should ask her husband to get her the tree itself so that

every day she can have all the fragrant flowers for herself. And informed her where the tree was to be found, in Indra-loka.

Satyabhama put her demand in front of Sri Krishna. Not wanting any disharmony between the two queens, the Lord agreed to bring down the tree for Satyabhama. In the meantime, Narada went to Indra Loka and told Lord Indra that some earthly mortals are bent upon stealing the Kalpavriksha.

One day, Sri Krishna under the pretext of roaming the garden of Indra-loka took a branch from Parijat tree and reached the earth. When Indra came to know about this, he became very angry and cursed that the tree will never bear fruit and the flowers will not stay on the tree after sunrise.

But the story of Parijat and Lord Krishna does not end here.

When Rukmini came to know that Sri Krishna has brought the Parijat tree on the earth, she too wanted its flowers for her daily offerings to the Divine. What a fix the husband must have been in! But he was Krishna after all – the Super Diplomat Dwarkadheesh! He planted the tree in Satyabhama’s garden in such a way that most of the tree’s flowers fell in Rukmini’s garden.

### Aspiration, a Psychic Fire Within

Such stories are deeply symbolic, often hiding many truths within, waiting to be revealed.

The Mother, through her psychic vision, saw Parijat as the flower that verily represents “aspiration”. According to her, this veritable aspiration represents the pure and sacred flame of the psychic fire rising from the depths of consciousness. Rukmini was the most devoted of Krishna’s wives and her wishes and aspirations were

always laced with surrender and detachment. Perhaps, that's why she got the blooms to herself while the tree still remained in Satyabhama's garden.

Aspiration, which is like an upward rising fire within, is also symbolised by Agni, which in the Veda is the Divine will-force, "the leader on the path," "the worker established in the man by the gods." (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 15: 390).

Sri Aurobindo also explains that like other gods, Agni in the Veda is a child of the universal parents, Heaven and Earth, Mind and Body, Soul and material Nature. In this light also, we see the truth of why the tree of Parijat, aspiration, has to be planted in the earth-consciousness from where it will rise through all levels of consciousness. This is the secret of all evolution.

### Desire and Aspiration

It is important to understand the difference between a desire laced with selfishness and an aspiration that is laced with selflessness.

A desire insists on being fulfilled because it comes from the ego-self. Aspiration is not the exuberance of the vital or the insistent hungry demand which is the characteristic of a desire. In simpler terms, aspiration can be understood as a purer and higher octave of desire and converts it into something divine and magical, because it comes from a place deep within, which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak of as the psychic.

Integral yoga has three basic limbs of sādhana – aspiration, rejection and surrender. Viewed from one angle, aspiration predominates the other two in its value. It is undeniable that if the sadhaka's aspiration

becomes sincere and ardent and all-enveloping, rejection and self-surrender too are bound to follow suit in no time.

True aspiration is a movement of the psychic, which Sri Aurobindo explains in one of his letters, is seated behind the heart, the emotional centre. Interestingly, as per the Tantra Yoga tradition, the kalpavriksha or the wish-fulfilling tree resides in the centre of a minor chakra called “Hrit” that is located right behind and slightly to the left of Anāhata or the heart chakra.

‘Hrit’ means the heart and is responsible for absorbing the energy or vital force from sun-rays, also known as *prāṇa* and help one manifest what one wishes to happen in the world. Also, the heart chakra is connected to our *prāṇamaya kosha* or the vital sheath which is connected to our breath, feelings and energy. Let us not forget that the medical term for breath is indeed “aspiration”. So, every wish is laced with aspiration or breath and this breath is the primordial energy that is the universal life force also known as *prāna*.

When this *prāṇa* is pure and crystal clear with intentions of love and oneness, we can rest be assured that our aspirations are indeed going to be fulfilled. Aspiration with an ego-centric attitude is more often a desire. And as long as desires rule our life, we are bound to face failures one way or another. When selfishness is replaced by selflessness, the hopes, wishes and dreams come true even when the means to achieve them seem impossible.

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“To live within, in constant aspiration towards the divine – that renders us capable of regarding life with a smile and remaining in peace whatever the external circumstances.”

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 232)

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# **RECEPTIVITY**

## **The Sword-Lily: Of Gladiators and Receptivity**





# Receptivity

Gladiolus  
Xhortulanus

Conscious of the Divine  
Will and surrendered to it

**The Grace is always with you; concentrate  
in your heart with a silent mind and you  
are sure also to receive the guidance and  
the help you aspire for.**

**(The Mother, CWM, 14: 87)**



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Gladiolus is the diminutive form of Latin word “Gladius” meaning a little sword with reference to its tall sword-like leaves. They belong to the iris family (Iridaceae) and is also called as the sword lily.

While Gladiolus species are native to many parts of the world, it is originally from Africa. This flower is seen as the symbol of resurrection and rebirth in many ancient cultures. That is because it is basically a bulb and technically a corm that goes dormant during winters. It almost seems like the plant has died but in fact when the time is right, new sword-like leaves sprout from the ground as if they are reborn.

When I first learned that the Mother had given the significance ‘receptivity’ to gladiolus flower, my immediate thought was about how we humans receive our first breath in order to be born. What if we are not able to receive that breath?

As I read more of the Mother, it started dawning on me that when the Mother talks about becoming conscious of our true self, or about psychic realisation, it’s almost as if we must die a symbolic death – die to our egos, so that we can be reborn again in our true and higher self, reborn to our divine self. This happens when we receive true knowledge of our self which comes as a breath of fresh air that enlivens us.

Most of us start living only after the spiritual ascension so to speak. Both the process of physical birth and the spiritual birth require an important aspect of “receptivity”.

### It Takes a Fighter’s Courage

The same word Gladius is the root for gladiator, a fighter who fights against wild beasts with the help of his sword. A sword by itself wields



no strength, unless the hand that holds it has immense courage. While the gladiator has the courage to receive the wild beasts knowing he can fight against them with total strength and surrender, a man who is on a spiritual quest does the same and is no less than a gladiator.

Some internet sites explain the word “receptivity” using an example of a gladiator who is willing to fight against the sheer animal forces through an act of receiving when no other man is willing to do so. A spiritual path too, among all attributes needs an important trait of “receptivity”, a willingness to receive whatever is laid down in front of us.

The Mother through her divine sight saw “receptivity” as the spiritual significance of this flower, *Gladiolus*, which helps us grow spiritually. Receptivity is otherwise described as the willingness to receive. Generally we think of receptivity as passive, an act that does not require us to do anything but just to receive. But in a deeper sense, receptivity is often a fight against our own ignorance that stops us from receiving the divine light of higher consciousness.

### Being Receptive to Divine Grace

I am reminded of the lines from Sri Aurobindo’s Hymn to Durga:

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“Mother Durga! Enter our bodies in thy yogic strength. We shall become thy instruments, thy sword slaying all evil, thy lamp dispelling all ignorance. Fulfil this yearning of thy young children, O Mother. Be the master and drive the instrument, wield thy sword and slay the evil, hold up the lamp and spread the light of knowledge. Make thyself manifest!”

(CWSA, 9, “*Dharma*”, No. 9, October, 1909)

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This powerful hymn to Mother Durga says that unless the Grace descends upon us as yogic strength, we will not be able to find courage to use our swords at an appropriate time and place for our spiritual goal. To use the sword, we need to receive the Grace. Wayne Dyer, a famous author of our modern times is known to have said, “By surrendering, you create an energy field of receptivity for the solution to appear”.

How do we receive Grace, asked a disciple to the Mother. In response, the Mother says, “The Grace is always with you; concentrate in your heart with a silent mind and you are sure also to receive the guidance and the help you aspire for.” (CWM, 14: 87)

By gradual practice of concentration and meditation, one is gradually able to open this door which allows the light to shine in on the darkest corners of our ego and starts purifying and transforming it, bit by bit.

### Being Open to the Guru’s Grace

It is easier said than done and lifetimes can pass by in order to perfect our practice. That is why a Guru is instrumental in our progress, showing us the path and acting as a mediator to help us receive the Divine Grace.

Again, a mistake disciples sometimes make is to attempt to intellectually ‘understand’ their Guru instead of receiving His or Her Divine Presence calmly into their souls without any doubt. What we fail to understand is this: to understand a master, one must himself become a master. We are primarily mental beings and often judge others with our own set of mental formulas. And while doing so, we fail to accept others from a place of surrender.

When we leave judgement and doubt aside, accept our Guru wholeheartedly – because let us also remember it is not we who choose our Guru, it is the Guru who chooses us – bhakti or a sense of devotion embraces us making us open to receive Grace.

When we allow this grace of a Guru to embrace us like a waterfall, we will then commune with his soul instead of his physical appearance or intellect (though that too may also happen with its own inner gains for our all-round progress of the outer instruments of body, life and mind). This will help us commune with the Divine grace, we may call it by whatever name – God, Source, Brahman or Universal Life-force.

### Self-giving is the Secret

But then there is a secret of how to relate to our Guru. It is a relationship not only of our inner communion and receiving but also of self-giving. It comes not by eagerly taking what one can for oneself but also what one can give to the Guru, who is essentially Divine for the disciple. Only in a spirit of mutuality can the divine love be developed. This brings us to the question: How can we give ourselves to our Guru?

For this the wise ones say, it is through our sadhana. Our practice is the highest form of giving ourselves to our teacher. As our sadhana becomes stronger and stronger by the day, we begin to experience a greater silence within and find ourselves more and more in a meditative state. At this point, the door opens, bringing us the light of divine Grace we so aspire for. This is the yoga we practice day in and day out.

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“The yoga we practise is not for ourselves alone, but for the Divine; its aim is to work out the will of the Divine in

the world, to effect a spiritual transformation and to bring down a divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital and physical nature and life of humanity. Its object is not personal Mukti, although Mukti is a necessary condition of the yoga, but the liberation and transformation of the human being. It is not personal Ananda, but the bringing down of the divine Ananda—Christ’s kingdom of heaven, our Satyayuga—upon the earth.”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 13: 71)

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### Open Wide the Consciousness to the Divine Influence

To sum it all, we need grace to use our sword to slay the ignorance that stops us from opening the door of receptivity. To receive the Divine Grace, one has to have the blessings of a Guru. But then, to receive the blessings of a Guru means to be sincere with our sadhana or practice. Even though many of us practice and pursue a steady sadhana, have an ardent faith and devotion to our Guru, still only a few of the aspirants actually progress on the path. Some progress faster, some a little bit slow and yet others stall on their path.

Once a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo: while all of us have the equal privilege of being close to the Divine, why then does the Divine shakti cannot make us progress equally? Sri Aurobindo answered that even if the Divine wants to give us more, we are not sufficiently open to receive the gifts. Receptivity is the flow of cosmic energy and cosmic light. This cosmic light has the ability to expand, so never be satisfied with the amount of light you receive. With the power of concentration and gratitude, open the door of receptivity a little bit more. He writes to one of his close disciples:

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“The fundamental principle and the whole method of the Integral Yoga is to open wide the consciousness to the divine influence. Only those sādha-s who can sufficiently open themselves to the divine power and action and receive them in themselves, can cherish a hope for the ultimate realisation, not others.”

(Jugal Kishore Mukherjee,  
*The Practice of the Integral Yoga*, 2003, p. 75)

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### Be Like a Child

One way to increase receptivity is to be like a child. No matter how advanced we are in our spiritual path, we can make the fastest progress by having a child-like attitude, a sincere and genuine feeling of a child.

Another way to increase our receptivity is to offer our highest gratitude to the Divine every single day, especially before we commence our meditation. We have so many near and dear ones and not all of them are selected to follow a spiritual path. Then why are we chosen and why has the Supreme given us the aspiration inside us to follow this path? If we reflect upon this one attribute and offer our heartfelt gratitude, receptivity is bound to increase by leaps and bounds.

The Supreme is like sunlight that wants to brighten up our day, but if we keep only one curtain open, then it cannot enter. It is up to us to open all the curtains so that the maximum possible light can reach us.

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“Every morning at the balcony, after establishing a conscious contact with each of those who are present, I identify myself with the Supreme Lord and dissolve myself completely in Him. Then my body, completely passive, is nothing but a channel through which the Lord passes His forces freely and pours upon all His Light, His Consciousness and His Joy, according to each one’s receptivity.”

(The Mother, CWM, 16: 228)

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# **PROGRESS**

## **Cancer-buster Rosy Periwinkle**



**PROGRESS**



Periwinkle  
Catharanthus roseus

Progress: This is why we  
are on earth.

**Let us progress ourselves,  
it is the best way of making  
others progress.**

(The Mother, CWM, 15: 76)



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Long time ago, once my uncle visited my home and our whole garden was filled with one plant in full blossom, the Madagascar Periwinkle or the Rose Periwinkle. He laughed out loud, saying why on earth would people plant flowers that are of no use, have no scent and grow like weeds. He suggested we grow a few rose bushes and jasmines instead. He also added that these ‘weeds’ are seen growing more in cemeteries; so, my mother immediately had the gardener remove these plants.

Years later, I came to know how ignorance colours our existence. There is more to this angiosperm than meets the eye; in fact it is a life saver. This small flowering plant with its inconspicuous looks houses an inscrutable chemical-processing unit.

### Science and the Secrets of Periwinkle

In the year 1950, scientists discovered that this plant processes a chemical known as Vinblastine, an incredibly useful cancer drug that stops cells from entering mitosis interrupting cell division which is one of the key factors of cancer. The World Health Organisation considers this drug as the most efficacious and safe. Not only that, it is a very cost-effective medicine.

But the medicine comes with a problem. They need around 500 kilograms of leaves and flowers of this plant to produce just 1 gram of Vinblastine. Scientists had been in a 60-year long mission to understand how this plant makes this chemical in a natural way so that they can prepare it synthetically and make it available for a greater number of people perhaps at a much lower cost.

Finally, a professor by the name Sarah O’Connor after a 15-year study figured out that Vinblastine is one of the most structurally complex medicinally active natural products. Using a very modern state-of-the-

art genome sequencing techniques, they finally pinned down the pathway to Vinblastine production.

A large number of laboratories around the world were involved in searching for answers, and the secrets of this now famous plant periwinkle finally emerged. They figured out that in order to manufacture Vinblastine synthetically, there ought to be a particular step-by-step process. A staggering 31 steps in all!

Another small interesting fact about Madagascar Periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*) is that insects leave this plant alone. Even deer do not feed upon them. Because of this one feature, this plant is loaded with alkaloids that are necessary for the production of chemicals such as Vincristine and Vinblastine.

### Progress – an Integral Part of Life

So you see, the rose periwinkle that you probably pull out like a weed and throw away is actually a very impressive super-plant indeed. What the plant has taught us over 60 long years is we cannot reach our goal without progressing one step at a time. And guess what, the Mother through her divine vision, gave “progress” as the spiritual attribute to this flower, rose periwinkle.

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“Whatever occupation or task falls to your lot, you must do it with a will to progress; whatever one does, one must not only do it as best one can but strive to do it better and better in a constant effort for perfection.”

(The Mother, CWM, 12: 53)

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Progress is an integral part of life; every aspect of our life is about progress. Starting from our birth, we are fed and taken care of by our parents so that we can grow healthy and show signs of progress. Every stage of turning, grasping, crawling, walking or talking becomes a milestone to celebrate. When we watch a child grow, the progress seems natural and involuntary as if there is a divine orchestra playing in the background. That is why the Mother said, “Progress is the sign of the divine influence in creation.” (CWM, 15: 75)

If not for progress, we would lead a life of stagnation, with no life purpose. But let’s not forget that a lot of effort needs to be put in order to progress from one stage to another. How many hours of hard study, sleepless nights and eye-glasses that only get thicker to reach the number of accolades for which we aspire!

Progress always happens in steps, and this is not only true at a microcosmic but also at a macrocosmic level. For instance, at the cosmic level, the planet Jupiter has a 12-year cycle around the Sun. At a microcosmic level, we need 12 months to complete a year on planet earth or 12 hours to complete a day or night. The same 12 years are needed to progress from grade 1 to grade 12 of our educational system.

This system is not just true of our modern times but even in the past a disciple (*shishya* or *chela*) had to spend 12 years with his Guru in an ashram to become eligible for further growth. No wonder the planet Jupiter is also called as Guru in astronomical and astrological jargon.

Just like the rose periwinkle that takes 31 steps or maybe more to reach vinblastine, we cannot reach a PhD degree without completing the previous steps. At every stage whether it is a child studying for a board exam or an adult going to attend an interview, progress is the underlying factor that pushes us forward.

## Progress at a Deeper Level

While we are busy progressing towards our goals, there is a subtle layer of progress that is happening at a much deeper level. This progress is the process of evolution which is happening in nature at a miniscule level that is not visible to our human perception. But, once one begins to become increasingly self-aware and conscious through the practice of yoga or spiritual discipline, one becomes sensitive to and awakened to the inner progress of self as much as the outer progress.

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“That within us which seeks to know and to progress is not the mind but something behind it which makes use of it.”

(Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo, The Adventure of Consciousness*, chapter 3)

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Sri Aurobindo has uniquely described the concept of involution and evolution in his great works such as ‘*Savitri*’ and ‘*The Life Divine.*’ He says that matter is not essentially different from the spirit; they are the two poles of One Truth. So are the Inconscient and the Superconscient. And between the two poles is a continuum. So, when we see progress in the external reality, our inner reality is also gradually progressing through experience, wisdom and maturity.

As Nature is in progress continuously, called evolution, we are already and inevitably progressing towards a spiritualised individual and society. But this is a very slow, natural and unconscious process.

With sincere *tapasyā* and *sādhanā*, we can progress much faster. As the Mother explained through her drawing once, Yoga is the

conscious route which takes the human to the divine through a straight path, whereas in the pursuit of our ordinary living, we traverse the same journey through a great zig-zag of many lives.

### Progress and Transformation in Integral Yoga

As we become more sincere and serious about our sadhana and spiritual practice, a new transformation begins to happen and a new kind of progress starts to take place. According to Sri Aurobindo, the complete radical transformation which is the goal of Integral Yoga goes through three stages: psychic transformation, spiritual transformation and the supramental transformation.

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“In this Yoga, one can realise the psychic being as a portion of the Divine seated in the heart with the Divine supporting it there—this psychic being takes charge of the sadhana and turns the whole being to the Truth and the Divine, with results in the mind, the vital, the physical consciousness... —that is a first transformation.

“We realise it next as the one Self, Brahman, Divine, first *above* the body, life, mind and not only within the heart supporting them—above and free and unattached as the static Self but also extended in wideness through the world as the silent Self in all and dynamic too as the active Divine Being and Power, Ishwara-Shakti, containing the world and pervading it as well as transcending it, manifesting all cosmic aspects.

“But, what is most important for us, is that it manifests as a transcending Light, Knowledge, Power, Purity, Peace, Ananda of which we become aware above and which

descends into the being and progressively replaces the ordinary consciousness by its own movements—that is the second transformation.

“We realise also the consciousness itself as moving upward, ascending through many planes physical, vital, mental, overmental to the supramental and Ananda planes. This is nothing new; it is stated in the Taittiriya Upanishad that there are five Purushas, the physical, the vital, the mental, the Truth Purusha (supramental) and the Bliss Purusha; it says that one has to draw the physical self up into the vital, the vital into the mental, the mental into the Truth Self, the Truth Self into the Bliss Self and so attain perfection.

“But in this Yoga we become aware not only of this taking up but of a pouring down of the powers of the higher Self, so that there comes in the possibility of a descent of the Supramental Self and nature to dominate and change our present nature and turn it from nature of Ignorance into nature of Truth-Knowledge (and through the supramental into nature of Ananda)—this is the third or supramental transformation.

“It does not always go in this order, for with many the spiritual descent begins first in an imperfect way before the psychic is in front and in charge, but the psychic development has to be attained before a perfect and unhampered spiritual descent can take place, and the last or supramental change is impossible so long as the two first have not become full and complete...”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 29: 497-498)

## Savitri's Yoga

In *Savitri*, we find a beautiful description of Savitri finding her soul – the first psychic transformation that Sri Aurobindo speaks of.

A sealed identity within her woke;  
She knew herself the Beloved of the Supreme:  
These Gods and Goddesses were he and she:  
The Mother was she of Beauty and Delight,  
The Word in Brahma's vast creating clasp,  
The World-Puissance on almighty Shiva's lap,—  
The Master and the Mother of all lives  
Watching the worlds their twin regard had made,  
And Krishna and Radha for ever entwined in bliss,  
The Adorer and Adored self-lost and one.  
In the last chamber on a golden seat  
One sat whose shape no vision could define;  
Only one felt the world's unattainable fount,  
A Power of which she was a straying Force,  
An invisible Beauty, goal of the world's desire,  
A Sun of which all knowledge is a beam,  
A Greatness without whom no life could be.  
Thence all departed into silent self,  
And all became formless and pure and bare.  
Then through a tunnel dug in the last rock  
She came out where there shone a deathless sun.  
A house was there all made of flame and light  
And crossing a wall of doorless living fire  
There suddenly she met her secret soul.

(CWSA, 34: 525-526)

Yet, this is only the first transformation that Sri Aurobindo speaks of. Spiritual progress doesn't stop here. Even the spiritual transformation cannot entirely transform an ignorant mind of a human. For this he adds, one has to realise the dynamic nature of the divine which is called the supermind that has an innate ability to transform the entire being and nature of humanity.

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“Man is a transitional being, he is not final; for in him and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine supermanhood.

“The step from man towards superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth's evolution. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring, but troubled and limited human existence—inevitable because it is at once the intention of the inner Spirit and the logic of Nature's process.”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 12: 157)

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Let me conclude by saying that the humble periwinkle flower reminds us of the inevitability and the necessity of progress. While we think that our progress is limited to our lives alone, let us not forget that we are a part of the whole and we are constantly striving to become a better humanity.

Cancer being one of leading causes of death, second only to cardiovascular diseases, Periwinkle seems like a herb that gives us hope, asking us to conquer disease and death in a step-by-step fashion. While doing so in our external world, we are surely progressing inwardly bringing a greater and more conscious awareness to our collective life.



# **COURAGE**

**Arka, the 'Courage' Crown Flower**





# COURAGE

Calotropis gigantea

Bold, it faces all dangers.

**Fear is hidden consent. When you are afraid of something, it means that you admit its possibility and thus strengthen its hand. It can be said that it is a subconscious consent. Fear can be overcome in many ways. The ways of courage, faith, knowledge are some of them.**

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 243-244)



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“Indeed, men have always considered themselves victims harassed by adverse forces, those who are courageous fight, the others complain.”

(The Mother, CWM, 10: 118)

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Courage or bravery refers to the act of doing something even though it is frightening or “out of our comfort zone”. Fear is the opposite of courage, yet sometimes when faced with fearful situations one discovers one’s hidden courage.

Courage is often a difficult trait to master. Throughout the world different forms of martial arts developed to help individuals strengthen themselves and face with greater confidence and courage challenging situations in life.

### Courage and Sadhana

In our everyday life when confronting challenging situations and faced with obstacles, we need great courage. But when one takes to sadhana and sincere spiritual quest, courage becomes even more necessary. As the Mother frequently reminded the disciples and children at the Ashram, it takes a lot of courage to simply live according to the call of one’s real self.

To live a life of integrity, of simplicity, of being in a state of *nirodha* also known as beingness, is the highest form of valour or courage. This kind of spiritual courage comes when one clearly knows what is right and what is wrong, when one can discern continuously, when at every step of life one takes actions without faltering and without giving up the path of integrity.

To follow the path of integrity, to follow the *yama* and *niyama* of yoga is not for the faint hearted. The kind of courage necessary must be resistant to being subdued by all kinds of fear. In other words, it is not the absence of fear but rather its mastery which is essential.

### The ‘Courage’ Flower

The Mother through her intuitive sight gave the spiritual significance of “courage” for the flower we know commonly as the Crown Flower, often used in religious rituals and offered particularly to Lord Shiva and Hanuman. The plant, *Calotropis Gigantea*, is a large shrub belonging to the milkweed family. The flowers are beautiful with five purple, pink or white petals and a small crown emerging in the centre, hence the name crown flower.

It must be noted that the flower is poisonous and has to be handled with care. However, as the *Charaka Samhita* tells us, despite being poisonous, it has an innate ability to heal diabetes, stomach ulcers, digestive disorders, elephantiasis and various other ailments. It is indeed interesting that just as the crown flower has an ability to heal the core of our physical body, on a deeper level it holds within the vibration of inner courage which is also known to emerge from our core strength.

In the Indian knowledge systems, Dhanurveda or science of warfare is described as one of the 18 branches of applied knowledge (also known as Upaveda). Learning and practice of traditional martial arts was always an important aspect of training warriors. Rigorous physical training strengthens the person’s core and enhances the rajasic tattva in the Manipura chakra or solar plexus which in turn helps one become fearless and courageous.

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“As soon as you enter the rajasic nature, you like effort. And at least the one advantage of rajasic people is that they are courageous, whereas the tamasic people are cowards. It is the fear of effort which makes one cowardly.”

(The Mother, CWM, 7: 26)

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## Arka and Lord Surya

Arka is the Sanskrit name given to *Calotropis gigantea*. Arka is also one of the names for Lord Surya as mentioned in *Surya Ashtotra Shatanamavali*. The Sun temple in Konark is known as Arka-tīrtha.

Being a very ancient plant, there are many references to Arka in old scriptural texts of Hindus. Once when the Gods were performing a sacrificial ritual for Lord Surya, the milk spilled. From the milk, sprang a plant which the Gods called as Arka. When we pick the flowers of this plant, a milky latex oozes out which again is poisonous and has to be handled with care.

Being the flower of Lord Surya, there are many ways in which this plant is used in rituals. On the day of Rathasaptami (the day when the sun’s chariot turns north), many devout Hindus take a purification bath using seven Arka leaves (one on their head, two on the shoulders, two on the knees and two on their soles). This ritual along with the chanting of the following *stotra* is said to give immense courage, valour, self-confidence and happiness. Also, the leaves are believed to help get rid of skin diseases.

*Sapta Sapta Maha Sapta,  
Sapta Dweepa Vasundara*

*Sapta Arka Parna Madaya,  
Saptamyam Snana Maacharet*

Arka Bhasma

Jyotisha, one of the six Vedanga-s which are the disciplines that supplement the study of Vedas, deals with calculation of time, observation of heavenly bodies and their movements. It concerns itself with astronomy and astrology – which is not about making predictions as is often narrowly believed – but rather a close study of forces caused by the movement of celestial bodies.

Jyotisha tells us that the sun is a luminary which rules our self-identity, vitality, joy, confidence and most importantly, imparts us courage. Interestingly, Arka *bhasma* or the sacred ash made from the roots of this plant is applied when the sun is said to be ill placed in a person's natal chart. A person with a weak placement of sun is said to have low self-esteem and courage. Arka *bhasma* is said to ameliorate the condition and help the person become confident and courageous.

More on Arka Roots

Arka flowers are offered on the day of Ganapathi puja. It is said that the roots of Arka plant take the shape of Lord Ganesha as they grow older and hence it is very special to the Lord. The roots too have healing powers, and tribal women in some parts of India hold the Arka roots during the birth of a child. It not only eases the pain of child-birth but is also believed to keep them safe during child-birth.

Another ritual associated with Arka plant is called as Arka *vivaha* or the marriage ceremony with the roots of Arka. In the past, when a man lost his wives to death one after another, a ritual was performed where

the man used to marry the Arka plant. After this ceremony, the man was believed to be rid of the curse which was making him a widower.

### Rediscovering Ancient Wisdom

Many rational minds in the 21st century may find this to be a mere superstition, but we must recognise that there is indeed an amazing connection between nature and mankind which our ancestors revered and as a result were blessed with revelations of the hidden truths of nature – many of which modern science has also proved through its own methods.

In the course of time, a great bit of the wisdom hidden in Mother Nature's gifts, once revealed by our ancient seers and sages, was forgotten. But thankfully there seems to be now a renewed interest in rediscovering these treasures, as we see today greater interest in holistic healing approaches such as Ayurveda and other traditional systems.

### Courage and Faith: A Story from the Mahabharata

While courage can take many colours and forms in mundane life or in spiritual life, it has its firm foundation in faith. Faith is a state of unreserved openness to possibilities and profundities of life. Faith is to believe in the unknown, a signpost into the future. Without a leap of faith, one cannot be courageous enough to build a relationship with one's *ishta deva*, chosen deity or one's Guru. Faith is indeed a prerequisite for the immense courage needed in the spiritual path.

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“To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster, only two things are needed, two that go always

together—the Grace of the Divine Mother and on your side an inner state made up of faith, sincerity and surrender.”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 32: 9)

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This faith when turned towards your teacher, is one-pointed focus which eventually takes us to the ultimate goal in our path. The power of faith when combined with courage is so clearly demonstrated in the story of Upamanyu in the Adi parva section of the Mahabharata. Upamanyu was the disciple of the great *acharya* Ayodha Dhaumya Muni who belonged to the lineage of Rig-Vedic rishis.

Once Upamanyu was instructed by his Guru to take the cows for grazing. When he returned to the ashram and offered his obeisance at the feet of his teacher, his teacher asked him what Upamanyu ate all day as he was not given food from the ashram. Upamanyu replied that he begged for alms. The Guru instructed him not to do so as he cannot have anything without the alms being offered to his teacher first.

Upamanyu obeyed and continued with his task of taking the cows for grazing. The days passed, and Upamanyu still seemed to be quite fit and healthy. The Guru again asked him what he had been sustaining upon. Upamanyu replied that he was offering to his guru the first alms that he received, but would then go begging again for the second time to feed himself. The Guru instructed him that such a practice was not ethically acceptable as he was taking the food away from others in need, which Upamanyu again heartily obeyed.

The story continues with Upamanyu still sustaining pretty well with no sign of weakness, and this time he tells the Guru that he has been living on the cow’s milk. The Acharya says that the cow’s milk is for the calves and not for him, and by taking the milk he is depriving the



calves of their food. Upamanyu now stops drinking milk. But again, when seeing him healthy and fit the Guru asks him the source of his sustenance, he says that he lives on the froth that oozes out from the calves' mouth after they sucked all the milk from the cow.

Again, the Acharya denies Upamanyu this privilege. Now, having nothing to eat, Upamanyu starts eating the flowers and leaves of Arka plant. Not knowing that these flowers are poisonous, he goes blind and falls into a well. When Upamanyu does not return to the Ashram, the Acharya gets concerned and goes searching for him. When he finds him intoxicated and blind, he tells him to pray to the twin Ashwinikumaras, the divine healers and ask for a cure.

Humbly and sincerely, Upamanyu offers his prayers with total faith, trust and courage. Ashwinikumaras are propitiated with Upamanyu's prayers and come to offer him a cake to cure his blindness. But Upamanyu refuses that his Guru has ordered him not to eat anything offered to him without his permission. They try their best to make him eat, but to no avail. They are immensely pleased with Upamanyu's steadfast guru-bhakti and not only grant him his health but also bless him with supreme auspiciousness.

Stories such as these teach us the subtle meaning of faith, sincerity, trust in the unknown and the courage needed to stay on the path. For this, only one thing is needed and that is to be fearless.

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“Fear is hidden consent. When you are afraid of something, it means that you admit its possibility and thus strengthen its hand.”

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 243-244)

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## Concluding Thoughts

Over the past few months, as I have meditated on the spiritual significance of flowers as intuitively guided by the Mother, I am beginning to not only understand the deeper meaning of these flowers but how they have been guiding humanity and mankind all along in their subtle but profound ways, healing us physically, mentally, emotionally and of course, spiritually.

We know that only by an inward turning and by quietening the noise of the mind and vital through concentration and meditation, we can contact the truth of our true, inmost being. Similarly, to reveal the true essence and hidden powers of the flowers, we need to learn how to connect with their consciousness.

For this, we first need to spend some conscious time with them, grow them, see them blossom, talk to them and become friends with them. Only when we interact with nature in full inner awareness, will we truly understand her secrets and powers.

# **GOODWILL**

**Goodness and Fragrance of Sweet Alison**





**GOODNESS**

**Lobularia maritima**

**Modest in appearance, does not  
make a show but is always  
ready to be useful.**

**Sweetness without strength and  
goodness without power are incomplete  
and cannot totally express the divine.**

**(The Mother, CWM, 10: 280)**



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An inner happiness abode in all,  
A sense of universal abode of all,  
A sense of universal harmonies,  
A measureless secure eternity  
Of truth and beauty and good and joy made one.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, 33: 291)

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Chanakya, the great philosopher-economist-jurist-strategist once said that the fragrance of flowers spreads only in the direction of the wind, but the goodness of a person spreads in all directions. Not so with a flower named sweet Alyssum also known as Sweet Alison (*Lobularia maritima*). It is an invasive shrub that is used to blanket gardens or landscapes as it spreads really fast.

Alyssum flowers come in different shades and look really pretty and beautiful. The flower has a lively honey-like fragrance that almost takes over the entire garden. Their honey-like fragrance is the reason they attract honey bees, butterflies and other pollinators and are, therefore, a favourite of all gardeners throughout the world.

Goodwill or goodness are almost like Sweet Alison that comes in different shades of colours and also has the ability to spread, almost having a kind of domino effect on others. Perhaps because of this innate quality of spreading fragrance, the Mother gave this flower the spiritual significance ‘Goodwill’ and added a description – “modest in appearance, does not make a show but is always ready to be useful.”

### What is Good and What is Goodness?

But what constitutes goodness or goodwill and how do we define “Good”? Perhaps good and goodness are mostly illustrated than

defined. Both have been the topic of debate for eons among philosophers, poets and religious leaders alike.

Often our definition of good depends upon the choices we make, and these choices can depend upon a variety of factors such as ethics, morality, philosophy and religion. In a narrow way, good is generally considered opposite of evil. And an act of goodness is understood as something that promotes love, justice, happiness, generosity and overall sense of contentment.

In the drama ‘Prometheus Unbound’ Shelley wrote:

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.  
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;  
And all best things are thus confused to ill.  
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,  
But live among their suffering fellow-men  
As if none felt: they know not what they do.

What he perhaps meant was this: to do good one has to be powerful. But as is often the case powerful people easily get corrupted and in turn promote evil. On the contrary, it is wrong to assume that powerful people can never do good. The Mother reminds us:

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“Sweetness without strength and goodness without power are incomplete and cannot totally express the divine.”

(The Mother, CWM, 10: 280)

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It is thus very tricky to define good and its adjective, goodness. If I were to define goodness in a phrase, I would call it ‘alignment with life’. When we are in alignment with nature and life, goodness prevails. And there is no better teacher than nature herself who is

always abound with goodness and bounty that we overlook and take for granted.

I remember a poem I once read on the internet:

It was almost time for harvest.  
Her boughs, laden with fruit  
Engorged by the goodness  
Received from the roots;  
Put strain on her branches;  
Far more than she could take  
Even holding too much treasure  
Can cause someone to break.

Mother Nature teaches us that being good is not only laden with obstacles but also needs a lot of faith and perseverance. Somehow, more often than not, it is the good people who suffer a lot and are taken for granted. But when faith prevails, nothing deters them from their path of goodness. Such is the quality of this trait. This is not just goodness but “spiritual goodness.”

### Storytime

There is a beautiful story of two farmers that illustrates this kind of goodness. Once upon a time, in a village lived a farmer who was not only kind but also of very good nature. His name was Paramraj. He lived in a small humble hut with his wife and two children. He owned a small piece of land where he grew crops such as rice and vegetables. He did not earn much, but he was content, hard-working and happy.

Param was always kind and helpful to others. His goodness was known to almost every person in the village. They knew they could depend upon him for any help they wanted. There was none who

disliked or hated him. Except for his next-door neighbour named Charanraj. He hated Param because of his very nature of being kind and generous.

Charan was a lazy man. He did not put much effort in his work; as a result his land yielded poor crop, year after year. And this made him jealous of his neighbour Param who seemed to live happily on a small piece of land. One year, Charan could no longer contain his jealousy and just before days of harvest, set Param's farm on fire.

It was late in the night and Param was fast asleep. His other neighbours woke him up to alert him but it was too late. Almost all his crop was burnt and Param made very little money that year to sustain his family.

Param eventually came to know who was the culprit, but he let the matter rest without making it a big deal. But he promised himself that he would take action if it happens again. From then on, he was more vigilant during nights.

A few months later, he heard much commotion in his neighbour's home. There were sounds of crying and seemed like Charanraj was very upset. Several people had gathered around his house. Upon asking one of them, Param learned that Charan's only son was seriously ill and the village doctor could not do much about it.

Immediately, he took his bicycle and rode ten miles to the next village where his cousin was a doctor. He convinced him to go with him. The doctor was able to diagnose the disease and Charan's son recovered in a few days.

Some days later when Param went to meet his neighbour to inquire about his son, somehow the topic of fire came up. Param told him that he knew who was responsible for the incident and that made Charan



weep unconsolably. He confessed his sins. And then sheepishly asked Param, “you knew about what I had done, and yet you went all the way to bring the doctor for my son! Why?”

Param replied, “Those are two different things. My conscience would never permit me to do otherwise. When I learned about your situation, I immediately knew what was the right thing to do at that moment. So I did what was necessary, that’s all!” Charan was deeply moved listening to this, and silently resolved to change his attitude and get over his petty jealousies.

It is said that one’s goodness brings goodness to the world. Param’s goal was to be good and this helped him look at the bigger picture than a few incidents in the past. I am reminded of a beautiful quote of the Mother: “Do not let the view of the part hide the perception of the whole, and the details of one step obstruct the concentration of the goal.” (CWM, 14: 230). Goodness compels us to remember that we must aspire for the ‘wholeness’ of our being.

Goodness makes life fragrant when one is doing the best he can without expecting a result. Often people are good so that they receive good in return. But the Mother says that true goodness should be devoid of such intentions, and we should do good despite how others behave towards us. One must be good not for anything but for the “love of goodness”.

# **GENEROSITY**

## **Kashithumba, the Generous Flower**





# GENEROSITY

**Impatiens  
balsamina**

Gives and gives itself without bargaining.

**Nobleness and generosity are the soul's  
ethereal firmament; without them,  
one looks at an insect in a dungeon.**

**(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 12: 456)**



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Onam is an annual Hindu harvest festival from the Indian state of Kerala. *Pookkalam* (also written as *pookolam*) in front of the houses and temples is a common sight during the Onam days. The floral *rangoli* or *kolam* known as *onapookkkalam*, *athapookkalam* or just *pookolam* is made of gathered varieties of flowers mostly endemic to Kerala.

Traditionally, only *dashapushpam* (10 flowers) were used. One of the *dashapushpam* is Kashithumba (*Balsam*, *Impatiens balsamina*), also known as rose or garden balsam. These flowers blossom out of nowhere during the spring season.

An endemic species of plant native to India and Myanmar alone, it is believed that no one ever keeps their seeds or even plants them. They just spring out of the soil starting to bloom in various pastel shades of pink, lavender, white, yellow and sometimes in mauve too. It is a sight to behold as if they bloom generously in order to offer themselves during the festival.

The reason they sprout out of nowhere is because of a special mechanism called explosive dehiscence which disperses their seeds through a ballistic form. In this form, the seeds or spores are flung far from the parent plant when someone or something touches them. Therefore, this plant has also got a name “touch me not”.

This plant does not need the assistance of animals or humans to propagate. As mysteriously as they appear, they also vanish leaving us in wonder as to where did they go? Preparing in silence for their next colourful show?

## Be Like a Flower

The Mother has rightly said,

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“Be like a flower. One must try to become like a flower, open, frank, equal, generous and kind. . . A flower is open to all that surrounds it. Nature, light, the rays of the sun, the wind, etc. It exerts a spontaneous influence on all that is around it. It radiates a joy and beauty.”

(In conversation with Mona Sarkar,  
as told in his book *Sweet Mother*)

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The spiritual significance given by the Mother to this flower Balsam is ‘Generosity’. No wonder this flower generously blooms itself exactly during the festival season when flowers play a very important role in *pookkalam* spring rituals.

The Sanskrit word that represents the virtue of generosity is *daanam*. The sacred practice of giving dates back to ancient traditions and is regarded as a virtue in various world religions.

Science has also done its own inquiry into the effects of generosity on the human mind with potential links to positive hormones and neurochemicals such as Oxytocin that get produced when one feels generous or acts generously towards others.

The Latin word from which the English word ‘generosity’ is derived is “*generosus*” which means of noble birth. Up until the 16th century, to be generous meant akin to be of a noble lineage or high birth. However, slowly the meaning of generosity changed and instead of being associated with family lineage or heritage, it meant more of an

individual virtue in a human being, something that can be inculcated. Interestingly, there is an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo which says:

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“Nobleness and generosity are the soul’s ethereal firmament; without them, one looks at an insect in a dungeon.”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 12: 456)

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### Giving Oneself

My Guru Sri H.R. Nagendra from SVYASA Yoga University used to emphasise so much on being generous and to exercise those muscles of giving. Do some act of giving every day, he would say. Give a flower, and if you don’t find one, give a glass of water; and if you don’t find water, at least give a smile generously, he would end with a hearty laughter.

This reminds me of an East African Lungundan proverb, “You can share even if you have a little.” It is a feeling that makes one give, a feeling that we have enough to share.

The Buddha said that no true spiritual life is possible without a generous heart. Majority of us think of sharing in terms of wealth and possessions. While the first step of generosity is wealth, food and possessions, spiritual people have often said that we can be generous with anything we own. Vidya *daan* is sharing one’s knowledge without keeping it to ourselves. The most generous people are not only the ones who share their food and wealth but also their power, fame and sometimes themselves. This act of giving oneself is the true meaning of spiritual generosity.

## Dakshinā, Bhikshā and Dānam

As per the Vedic scriptures, the act of giving can be categorised in three different ways: *dakshinā*, *bhikshā* and *dāna*. While all three require the trait of generosity, *dāna* is the only virtue that gets the highest points and represents true spiritual generosity. Let us have a look at the three ways one can be generous.

Dakshinā is repayment. Bhikshā is alms. Dāna is charity. But the meanings are often confusing, as people often use these terms interchangeably to mean giving, regardless of the context. In olden times, poets were given *dāna* and in return they would compose songs known as *dāna-stuti* to praise the donor who mostly happened to be a king or someone royal. This kind of giving was more of a repayment and was categorised under *dakshinā*.

*Dakshinā* is basically repayment for services received. Unlike tangible goods, it is hard to evaluate the worth of services and therefore there was no fixed rate for this kind of offering. In olden days, only certain sections of people were offered *dakshinā*. When king Harishchandra disturbed Rishi Vishwamitra's *yagna*, he made amends by offering his own kingdom. So, that is not a gift or charity but *dakshinā* for the act of interrupting a *yagna*.

In the case of *bhikshā*, the receiver is in debt. So, he repays in intangible ways like granting blessings or karmic merit to the giver. This is seen even today in many religions and cultures. People offer food to monks and this act is seen as earning a good future karma. Almost all religions emphasise the act of giving to temples, priests or the beggars who line up outside. This is *bhikshā*, seeking spiritual merit and again not considered as charity or *dāna*.

*Go-dāna* or offering a cow was actually a *bhikshā*, done to earn spiritual merit. Kings used to perform *go-daan* to seek legitimisation of their kingship. Sometimes families offered *go-dāna* to poor families so that the deceased or relatives who passed away were ensured a better future.

In *dāna* or true charity, the giver writes off the loan as a matter of fact. The receiver is under no obligation. Hence, *daanam* is considered greater when compared to *dakshinā* or *bhikshā*.

While there are many stories in the *itihāsas* and *purāṇas*, one of the most popular stories is of Karna who was given the epithet *dānveer*, the courageous and most generous. He had a tragic life and his tragic death makes us ask the question – why such a generous person die that way?

But Karna's charity was without any expectation, which made him truly a *dānveer*. He did not earn any merit despite being charitable. When he donated his armour to Lord Indra, he was left vulnerable in the war. This is the true act of giving – to expect nothing in return.

Thus we know the difference between the three basically through the intention that is behind the act of giving. To be totally and truly detached from possessions and expectations makes one give without wanting anything in return.

### True Generosity

In this world, it is very hard to find people who do true charity work without wanting anything in return. In the heart of hearts, we at least want a spiritual gift of good karma. How many of us can turn into a *dānveer* like Karna or our generous flower that offers itself, *Impatiens balsamina*.



One thing interesting about Impatiens is the high endemism among these plants. Endemism is a state of a species being found in a single defined geographic location such as a state, an island or a defined zone. In India alone, only 210 species of Balsam were found and many of which were facing a threat due to industrialisation and changing landscapes.

Just like a miracle, in August of 2017, a research paper described that *Impatiens Walongensis*, a new species of Balsam has emerged in the eastern district of Arunachal Pradesh called Anjaw. Since then, five new species have emerged in and around Arunachal Pradesh with one name being *Impatiens arunachalensis* which bears beautiful purple flowers with pink throat.

Even though scientists have described the conservation status of Impatiens as critically endangered, these new species give us hope that true spiritual generosity, even though rare, is here to stay.

# **EQUALITY**

**On Candytuft, Equanimity and Finding Balance**





**EQUALITY**

Iberis

Immutable peace and calm

**The true Agni always burns in deep peace;  
it is the fire of an all-conquering will.  
Let it grow in you in perfect equanimity.**

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 159)



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*Iberis*, commonly called candytuft is a genus of flowering plants that belong to the family of Brassicaceae. These plants are one of a kind because they provide nourishment to a number of insects. Among them is the rare species of a butterfly named *Euchloe Tagis* which depends solely on these plants and their flowers for food.

Usually, we relate beautiful blossoms to divine fragrances but not so with candytuft. They don't particularly have a pleasing smell, definitely not like candy. This is why they are great for landscaping as they keep certain invasive pests away. Candytuft flowers have their peculiar smell because of a chemical they produce, glucosinolates, which is characteristic of the Brassicaceae family. There are about 30 varieties of these plants, all of which are quite popular among gardeners for their beautiful tuft-like flowers and their ability to grow between rocks and staying evergreen throughout the year.

### Spiritual Significance of Candytuft

The Mother gave spiritual significances to more than 850 different flowers, based on her inner communion with the unique vibration of the flower. Each significance speaks of an attribute or a necessary trait that we must cultivate as we progress in our inner journeys towards our own divine self. For candytuft flower, the spiritual significance she has given is – 'equanimity'.

If you are wondering what made the Mother choose candytuft flower for equanimity, maybe the flower itself has an answer for you. Could it be that when seen from a distance the cluster of flowers looks like one flower but when we get closer we can see the individual small white flowers having their own sepals, petals and a centre?

Perhaps the same analogy can be given for our planet earth. When seen from the sky, all life on earth appears to be moving and acting as

one unit with all of us being equal and enjoying the same resources that Mother Earth gives us. Just like candytuft flowers depending on their single root and the same soil. While these plants live in harmony with nature, accepting equality among them, we as human beings work from a place of ego and thus have difficulty with equality.

That is why perhaps, the Mother wants us to meditate upon these flowers to see how we can cultivate their beautiful attribute of equanimity in our day-to-day existence. While equanimity is definitely not the same as equality, the former always leads to the latter.

Equality can be understood on various levels. At the outermost level of collective life, for example, it means that we all are equal not just in flesh and blood but also have equal rights and duties and privileges and responsibilities as citizens of a country. Over the long march of human history, philosophers and thinkers have spent much time deliberating on this value of equality, along with other human values such as freedom and brotherhood.

### Foundation of Sadhana

As per the Indian spiritual thought, equality means an essential oneness which unites all beings, all existence. In other words, there is essentially no difference between a human being and a tree as they are both different manifestations of the same One Existence. The difference or diversity is in the manifestation which is just as true as the oneness underlying all the manifestation.

When understood in the sense of equanimity, equality means an equipoise, a state of perfect tranquillity that emerges because of an evenness of mind. In the Bhagavad Gita, the entire essence of the word 'yoga' is summarised as *samatvam* or equanimity.

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योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥2.48॥

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“Fixed in Yoga do thy actions, having abandoned attachment, having become equal in failure and success; for it is equality that is meant by Yoga.”

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As we go through all the ebbs and flows of life’s tides, by keeping a perfect inner equipoise which comes only with a perfect equality of mind and vital, one attains a Yogic equality of soul.

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“The equality which the Gita preaches is not disinterestedness,—the great command to Arjuna given after the foundation and main structure of the teaching have been laid and built, “Arise, slay thy enemies, enjoy a prosperous kingdom,” has not the ring of an uncompromising altruism or of a white, dispassionate abnegation; it is a state of inner poise and wideness which is the foundation of spiritual freedom.

With that poise, in that freedom we have to do the “work that is to be done,” a phrase which the Gita uses with the greatest wideness including in it all works, *sarvakarmāṇi*, and which far exceeds, though it may include, social duties or ethical obligations.”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 19:36)

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Sri Aurobindo has given great importance to equanimity, calling it as a foundation of spiritual sadhana.

He has also explained how equanimity is not a state of indifference or being complacent. To cultivate this special trait of equanimity, one does not lose his ability to emote or becomes indifferent. Instead, the idea is to gain a perfect mastery over one's emotional and mental reactions and responses. When we light a fire, we have to learn to keep it under check or else it could cause a mayhem.

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“The true Agni always burns in deep peace; it is the fire of an all-conquering will.

“Let it grow in you in perfect equanimity.”

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 159)

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### Finding that Balance

As a teacher of Hathayoga, much of my work involves emphasising the idea of bringing the left and right sides of our body and minds into balance. I wish to speak here of seven different practices that can help an individual cultivate equanimity as part of his or her self-development journey.

- 1. Releasing resistance:** Sometimes we are faced with a situation in life, primarily arising because of external factors over which we have no control. But most often we are also so addicted to being in control that we find difficult to surrender in such situations and our mind begins to fight. Such strong opposition to what life brings us not only destroys the peace of mind but also engages the

amygdala or that part of the brain which controls the fight or flight response. To cultivate equanimity, one must fully accept the present moment which will then lead us to make proper decision for action.

- 2. Recognise what can be controlled:** While this looks exactly opposite of the earlier point, it is equally true that we must learn what factors can be controlled and what we can't. This reminds me of the famous serenity prayer by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr:

God, grant me the serenity to  
Accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

- 3. Revitalise in nature:** Nature always heals. No matter how tired we are, a walk in the woods revitalises us in a beautiful way. It calms us and makes us realise that there is a bigger reality behind everything we are going through. It helps us gain a wider and deeper perspective. Taking a few deep breaths in a lush green garden or observing the dawn and dusk or planting the feet on wet grass are different ways in which we can ground ourselves.
- 4. Revamp your routines:** Our daily routines can be a big factor when it comes to creating a balance in our lives. Setting up a nourishing healthy routine, eating at the same time of the day and going to bed at a regular hour can help us navigate our lives when other things are not going so well. Having a regular physical exercise practice, attending spiritual *satsangs* or reading inspirational books, going for a long hike, or even having a



practice of eating dinner with family every night can create a sense of synergy and equanimity.

- 5. Meditation:** As a long-time practitioner of meditation and as a hathayoga teacher, there is nothing better other than meditation that I can recommend to bring calm and peace which are essential for cultivating equanimity. Meditation is like a magic pill that cures everything. Many people know how to meditate but they don't because they find it boring. Many others try it for a few days and fall off the habit.

Meditation is not as difficult as it sounds. We sit in an easy pose, close our eyes and focus on our breath. If thoughts distract us, we bring ourselves back to our breath. Continuous practice of meditation helps us not only calm down but also improves productivity and efficiency. We sleep better and our health improves as our anxieties are kept in check.

- 6. Reconnecting with our values:** It is important to ask ourselves from time to time – what matters to us the most. Identifying with our highest values, finding our self-worth and functioning from that place of dignity and integrity – these are some of the best gifts we can give ourselves. In the middle of our hectic lives, we often end up doing more for others and in the process forget to take care of ourselves.

Correcting the course will not only bring back the joy and zest for life but also prepare us to give more of ourselves and support others in our lives in a more loving way. If you are a workaholic or if the time spent on social media is making you feel depleted in some way, take a step back and retreat. Creating some boundaries

and saying no for the sake of our health help us gradually regain an inner equipoise.

- 7. Reignite your passion:** This is one of my favourite practices! As we grow older, we begin to lose the zest for life. We stop learning new things, we forget to refuel our spirits, that joy of dancing or singing old movie songs. Whenever life throws lemons at me, I enter the kitchen to make an elaborate meal. That really helps me de-stress. I encourage all to find that passion which can help them to reconnect with the joy of life.

While the challenges in life are not going to go away no matter what our age is, we must find and develop for ourselves simple practices which can help us find that inner state of equilibrium and balance. Creating balance can help soften the discomforts of life. And in time, we will find that the most difficult hurdles were in fact the biggest stepping stones in our life. Because they taught us not only resilience and endurance but also helped us grow inwardly by progressive cultivation of equanimity.

**PEACE**

**Of Indian Mulberry and Indispensable Peace**



**PEACE**

Indian mulberry  
Morinda Citrifolia

Peace in the Sex Center  
Indispensable for beginning the Yoga

**Nowhere will you be able to find  
Peace unless you have peace  
in your heart.**

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 138)



[renaissance.aurosociety.org](http://renaissance.aurosociety.org)

Morinda is the largest genus of the *Rubiaceae* family and its 11 species are found in India. They are known by many names such as the great Morinda, Indian mulberry, noni, beach mulberry and cheese fruit.

Scientifically known as *Morinda Citrifolia*, the Indian Mulberry is a fruit-bearing tree with its native range extending across Southeast Asia and Australasia. It is a resilient plant, growing across a wide variety of habitats such as tropical climes, drought-ridden lands, volcanic terrains, lava-strewn coasts, etc. In spite of this, the plant bears flowers and fruits all year through, as if making peace with all situations.

Commonly known as the noni berry, the fruit is used for direct consumption, for health drinks, is cooked as a vegetable and is used for dyes. Lately, it has gained in significance commercially and is used for both cosmetic and intrinsic health purposes.

### The Mulberry Flower

The Mulberry flower that bears this sweet-pungent tasting fruit is a small and placid white flower with typically five distinct petals. The petals are curved and recurved inwards making it look very much like a star. Each flower emerges from a bulb, and these grow off a hard rounded base.

As a child, I grew up in a small hill station town named Sunabeda, which among other wild trees was dense with mulberry plants. I have spent many a day picking the delicious fruit without paying much attention to the silent flower. I, however, remember thinking in one odd instance that the clump of whites makes them look like Nature's ready-made bouquet.

Among several flowers symbolising one or another aspect of peace, the mulberry flower also finds a place in the Mother's list of spiritual significances of flowers.

Mulberry is popular more for its fruit than for its flower. The fruit is unmistakable for its maroon-purple tinge and sweet taste. The Citrifolia flower blooms and as if subtly coexists in peace amidst the tasty and deep purple mulberry fruit and the medicinally and cosmetically significant mulberry leaves. This is probably, why the Mother called it the flower that stands for Peace in the Sex Centre.

The sex centre, a place if not balanced, is high on lower vital impulses such as desire for sex, lust, anger, greed & gluttony. This centre is associated with the two lower chakras or centres of the traditional tantric system – the lotus of the abdomen (the Svādhithana or sacral chakra) which corresponds to the lower vital in Integral Yoga, and the lotus at the end of the spine (the Mulādhara or the root chakra) corresponding to the physical consciousness in Integral Yoga.

The lowest chakra, the mulādhara is the sex centre, Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter (CWSA, 28: 243). He adds that this centre “contains many other things, but also it is in its front the support of the sexual movements.” The svādhithana or sacral chakra is also said to control our creative expression as well as our sexual impulses. But it also controls our lowest vibrations of jealousy, envy and greed.

The mulādhara chakra especially is associated with the earth element and relates to our basic primal needs of survival, stability and support. Overeating, hoarding of materials, greed for money, lust, etc., can be seen as the negative expressions or the need for survival.

As I reflect on all this, it makes perfect sense to me that the Mother gave Citrifolia or Indian mulberry flower the spiritual significance of

‘Peace in the Sex Centre.’ She has ascertained that establishing peace in this chakra is indispensable for the beginning of the Yoga.

Peace is one of the 12 qualities that the Mother talks about as essential for the spiritual path.

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“Nowhere will you be able to find Peace unless you have peace in your heart”.

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 138)

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### Peace and Freedom

The Mother reminds us that peace is not just what we experience in serene environments, which undoubtedly allow us to become silent and sink in the purity. Nor is the peace only about an inner state of mind. When experienced fully, peace is a power and a poise in which the inner being lives, and from where it decides and acts.

From times immemorial in the Indian culture, calling Peace to manifest has been a part of our everyday practice. The invocation of the Shanti Mantra before and after every important work, ritual or *yajna* has been a prevalent practice.

The three *shanti-s* are invoked to be free from *tāpatraya* or The Burning Three – the three kinds of cravings, sufferings or anxieties. These are: *ādhibhautika* (physical suffering caused by natural forces, environment and surroundings, primarily effecting the physical life of the being); *ādhidaivika* (mental suffering caused by supernatural forces such as karmic factors); and *ādhyātmika* (suffering that comes when the individual has a spiritual yearning but is bogged down by the inner demons such as one’s lower nature and its imperfections.)

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“In the liberation of the soul from the Ignorance, the very first foundation is peace, calm, the silence and quietude of the Eternal and Infinite....”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 22: 1026)

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In essence, Peace has been equated to freedom for the soul. When the body, mind and heart are not subject to emotions arising out of the lower vital feelings, binding our impulses, thoughts and actions; we experience Peace. This freedom from bondage and thereby Peace, emerge from a true knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo has ascertained the importance of a Silent Mind and called it essential to sadhana. He says, “The first thing to do in the sadhana is to get a settled peace and silence in the mind.... It is in the silent mind that the true consciousness can be built” (CWSA, 29: 149-150). Further explaining the nature of Peace, he adds, “Peace is more positive than calm—there can be a negative calm which is merely an absence of disturbance or trouble, but peace is always something positive bringing not merely a release as calm does but a certain happiness or Ananda of itself. There is also a positive calm, something that stands firm against all things that seek to trouble, not thin and neutral like the negative calm, but strong and massive.” (CWSA, 29: 148).

### From Regret to Peace

Undoubtedly peace and calm are fundamental to all progress in inner and outer life. As a mother of two children - a toddler and a teenager, and having worked in the competitive corporate set up for years now, I am faced with daily situations that challenge the seat of Peace in my



heart and I sometimes struggle to establish its reign in me. Passion and an outcome-based effort take over. This sometimes leads to a feeling of regret.

Regret or achievement stemming from passionate action sometimes leads to anger, jealousy, fear, despair, even excitement and exaltation as the case may be. The impulses of lower vital begins to take over.

When I read of the Mahashakti and Her various aspects, forms and powers that run the universe and beyond, I find even this feeling of regret highly egoistic. It is as if I believed my effort was mine alone and that I am somehow separate from the Divine that runs and rules and transcends all.

Can I replace regret with Peace and a silent effort offered to the Mother? Her calming words come to my rescue:

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“Do not get agitated. Keep quiet and everything will be all right. Love and blessings.”

(The Mother, CWM, 14: 137)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Sheeba Naaz** is an experienced Yogasana teacher with specialisation in Ashtanga and Vinyasa principles, working with the energy body to heal and rejuvenate. She enjoys inspiring others to improve wellness and commit to a long-term health and fitness goals, energetic and collaborative with an outgoing spirit.

**Chitra Kolluru** has been influenced by the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through her family who have been devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and members of Sri Aurobindo Society. However, her association grew stronger since 2020 through her participation in weekly *Swadhyaya* sessions and workshops which drew her closer to the Mother. She works at Microsoft in Bangalore and is a mother of two teenagers.

**Beloo Mehra** is Editor of *Renaissance* and Director of BhāratShakti, an institute of Sri Aurobindo Society dedicated to research and programme development in areas related to Indian culture in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision for the future of India and her destined work for humanity.