

# Human Relations

& INTEGRAL YOGA



COMPILATION BY BELOO MEHRA



*Sri Anubhavo Society*

**AUROPUBLICATIONS**

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

# Human Relations and Integral Yoga

Compiled and Edited by Beloo Mehra

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*Sri Aurobindo Society*

**AUROPUBLICATIONS**

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

Compiler and Editor: Beloo Mehra

Book design: Beloo Mehra, Chitra Kolluru, Preeti Popli

Graphics: Beloo Mehra and Raamkumar L.

Copyediting: Gayatri Majumdar

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Wherever into a human story  
of love, there has entered  
**even an atom of pure love**  
and it has been allowed to  
manifest without too much  
distortion, we find a true and  
beautiful thing.

- *The Mother (CWM, 3: 73)*

# Introduction

Beloo Mehra and Raamkumar L.

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

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“Life is indispensable to the completeness of the creative spiritual realisation, but life released, transformed, uplifted, not the ordinary mentalised human-animal life, nor the demoniac or Titanic, nor even the divine and the undivine mixed together.

“Whatever may be done by other world-shunning or heaven-seeking disciplines, this is the difficult but unavoidable task of the integral Yoga; it cannot afford to leave unsolved the problem of the outward works of Life, it must find in them their native Divinity and ally it firmly and for ever to the divinities of Love and Knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

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This served as our inspiration as we begin this quest for Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s Light on the multidimensional and multilayered topic of Human Relations.

How do we find that inner divinity in our oh-so-human love and relationships? What is the ideal that our Gurus speak of, and how prepared each one of us is to work towards that idea? What are the challenges? These and other related topics became our research

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<sup>1</sup> CWSA [Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo] 23: 173

questions as we worked on the January 2023 issue of *Renaissance* [[renaissance.aurosociety.org](http://renaissance.aurosociety.org)] on the theme — Human Relations and Integral Yoga.

In this compilation, we do not aim to present an exhaustive compilation of everything Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said on human relationships. But we hope to highlight several of their insights which help throw a deeper light on selected aspects of this rather complex topic.

We begin with some selected words of the Mother which speak of the subtle relation between human love and Divine love. She explains that Divine love is an eternal, universal and a supreme force which descends and in its supreme self-giving manifests in even the darkest matter. She also illuminates that the deeper yearning behind all the movements of the creation, including human love, is to unite with the Divine, though we humans are unaware of it.

We also include some helpful guidance on the complexity of man-woman relationship especially when one or both the individuals also aspire for a spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother always emphasised that each case is different, and their guidance was directed to the specific context of each individual's inner aspiration. Nonetheless, there are several nuggets of wisdom that are helpful to a vast number of aspirants.

Sri Aurobindo elucidates that one of the aims in Integral Yoga is to purify and transform the usual egoistic human love into a purer love towards the Divine at all levels of the being. We feature a few selections from his letters where he explains that once one enters the spiritual life, the relationship with the Divine takes precedence over the ordinary social relations. Either the family relations naturally fall off or become the ground for *karmayoga* based on the soul's need.

We highlight a few letters of Sri Aurobindo in which he guides the *sādhakas* on the right place of friendship and affection in the path of Integral Yoga. Extremely helpful is his penetrating insight into the nature of human love that is primarily a movement of the vital ego.

We also include selected passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which give us practical guidance on how to handle the sources of disharmony in human relations in daily life. These sources include narrowmindedness, dislike and fault-finding in others.

*Renaissance* Editor, Dr. Beloo Mehra weaves together some spiritual insights on love and human relationships from various works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother along with examples from Indian literary tradition. Also included are some excerpts from Kishor Gandhi's book titled, *Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the New Age*. The selection focuses on the future of the family as explained by the Mother.

We also include a popular Pauranic story as retold by Sri Ramakrishna. *Such Indeed is Maya* is a story illustrating the hold our attachments have on the ordinary understanding and experience of human relationships. In *Make Not a Bond of Love*, Narendra Murty tells a beautiful Zen story to illustrate the significance of cultivating the attitudes of detachment (*vairagya*) and evenness of mind (*samatvam*) towards our human relationships.

Sri Aurobindo wrote several dramas which present human life with all its clashes and jostling, burning passions, voluptuous luxuries and huge ambitions. What spiritual light do these works hold for us? We invite you to explore this as you read a review of M. V. Seetharaman's book titled, *Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Dramatic Poems*. This review by Ravindra Khanna was first published in the April 1966 issue of

*Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram's journal.

Chitra Kolluru shares how she has been experiencing a deepening of her understanding of human relations as she makes conscious effort to be an aspirant on the path of Integral Yoga. Gayatri Majumdar's poem, 'Shilpi—Who Saw and Sang' evokes a range of subtle emotions that make up most of our human relations. And yet there is always that gentle reminder, a call even to transcend the bondage of those emotions towards an inner freedom which alone can be the true basis for any relationship.

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It is important to note that most of the passages selected from conversations and letters of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo featured in this issue are context based. To be more precise, some of the advice we find in these words was given specifically to the *sādhakas* in the Ashram who were pursuing Integral Yoga in their daily life. Some of our readers who are not necessarily pursuing this path may not find this guidance wholly applicable for them. Or even if they are aspiring for a spiritually guided life, they may not find themselves ready to receive this advice. That need not discourage anyone.

As aspirants it is important that we become conscious of the level of our development in various parts of our being. Such self-awareness, particularly of the movements in our vital and physical parts and their demands and preferences, will be helpful as we contemplate on the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on human love and relations.

We also need to become conscious of our commitment to our spiritual pursuit. Even when our highest aspiration is to live the ideals given to us by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo — whether it is about

relationships, love, marriage, sex, work or any aspect of life — it is important to be precisely aware of and clear on where one is in terms of one's own evolutionary journey. To what extent it is possible for me to live their teachings at this moment? And for which teaching I may still need to make much inner progress?

We must be realistic in this awareness, and simultaneously continue to keep calling for the divine grace every moment so that we can progress towards greater possibilities. We must never let go of the absolute faith in the Divine that it will someday become possible to realise the truth of their teachings.

It is good to accept one's present state completely, including all its defects, without beating oneself for what one is not today. This does not mean that we entertain the defects or hold a diluted aspiration, but that we do not depreciate ourselves or feel dejected in the name of aspiration or humility. Let us recall these words of the Mother, "An excessive depreciation is no better than an excessive praise. True humility lies in not judging oneself and in letting the Divine determine our real worth."<sup>2</sup>

An example may help. For a question regarding marriage, Sri Aurobindo replied to a disciple thus:

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"If she has the true call to the Yoga and not only an impulse due to the influence of others, the necessary conditions will be created. Even if the circumstances seem adverse, it will be only a test or ordeal and she will come through in the end. On the other hand, if she is not yet truly called or if her nature is not yet ripe, the marriage may take place and

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<sup>2</sup> CWM [Collected Works of the Mother] 16: 176

he may have to go through the ordinary life before she can return to the spiritual.”<sup>3</sup>

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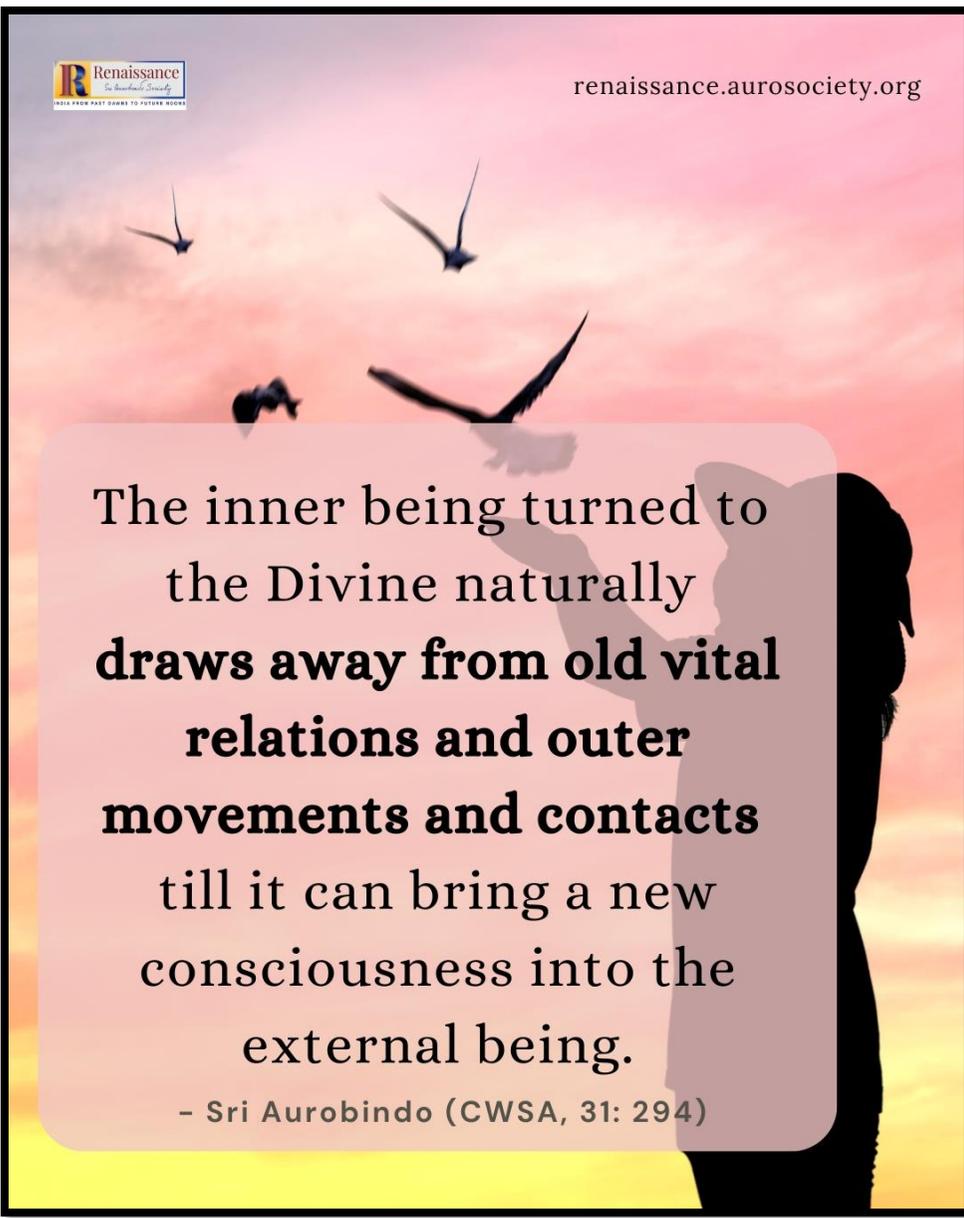
So the point is to become aware of the precise state of evolution of one’s own physical, vital and mental parts and realise how much they can support one’s deep psychic fire at present. It is important to accept one’s state of evolution entirely without judgments and harshness. And it is equally important to avoid self-depreciation and dejection of oneself for one’s present state.

The way forward is to receive the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo with an open and sincere heart. While at the same time we must aspire to live the Truth of these words with as much sincerity and honesty as is possible according to our own context and given the limitations of the present state of our nature. We surrender this effort at the feet of the Mother along with all the imperfections and defects of our nature to the Mother and pray for her Divine Grace to purify our nature more and more.

This is a sincere way to keep moving towards the ideals given to us by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. At the same time, we must also be extremely vigilant because the vital in us also has a tendency to constantly look for an opportunity to deceive and find a loophole to fulfil its own little preferences and desires. This may even mean misinterpreting the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo according to its petty demands. So an aspirant must never let go of vigilance on the path to becoming more conscious of one’s inner movements.

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<sup>3</sup> CWSA 35: 725-726



The inner being turned to  
the Divine naturally  
**draws away from old vital  
relations and outer  
movements and contacts**  
till it can bring a new  
consciousness into the  
external being.

- Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 31: 294)

# On Love Divine and Human

*The Mother*

**Editor's Note:** We feature selected words of the Mother<sup>4</sup> which speak of the subtle relation between human love and Divine love. She explains that Divine love is an eternal, universal and a supreme force which descends and in its supreme self-giving manifests in even the darkest matter. She also illuminates that the deeper yearning behind all the movements of the creation, including human love, is to unite with the Divine, though we humans are unaware of it. The disciples' questions are presented in italics.

## Love – An eternal, universal force

*Question: What is the relation of human love to Divine love? Is the human an obstacle to the Divine love? Or is not rather the capacity for human love an index to the capacity for Divine love? Have not great spiritual figures, such as Christ, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, been remarkably loving and affectionate by nature?*

**The Mother:** Love is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it.

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<sup>4</sup> CWM 3: 69-75

What you call love and think of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force. But because it is universal, it is not therefore an unconscious force; it is a supremely conscious Power.

Consciously it seeks for its manifestation and realisation upon earth; consciously it chooses its instruments, awakens to its vibrations those who are capable of an answer, endeavours to realise in them that which is its eternal aim, and when the instrument is not fit, drops it and turns to look for others.

Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love; they see their love come and grow and then it fades—or, it may be, endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement. But their sense in this of a personal experience all their own was an illusion. It was a wave from the everlasting sea of universal love.

Love is universal and eternal; it is always manifesting itself and always identical in its essence. And it is a Divine Force; for the distortions we see in its apparent workings belong to its instruments. Love does not manifest in human beings alone; it is everywhere. Its movement is there in plants, perhaps in the very stones; in the animals it is easy to detect its presence. All the deformations of this great and divine Power come from the obscurity and ignorance and selfishness of the limited instrument.

Love, the eternal force, has no clinging, no desire, no hunger for possession, no self-regarding attachment; it is, in its pure movement, the seeking for union of the self with the Divine, a seeking absolute and regardless of all other things. Love divine gives itself and asks for nothing.

What human beings have made of it, we do not need to say; they have turned it into an ugly and repulsive thing. And yet even in human beings the first contact of love does bring down something of its purer substance; they become capable for a moment of forgetting themselves, for a moment its divine touch awakens and magnifies all that is fine and beautiful.

But afterwards there comes to the surface the human nature, full of its impure demands, asking for something in exchange, bartering what it gives, clamouring for its own inferior satisfactions, distorting and soiling what was divine. To manifest the Divine love you must be capable of receiving the Divine love. For only those can manifest it who are by their nature open to its native movement.

The wider and clearer the opening in them, the more they manifest love divine in its original purity; the more it is mixed with the lower human feelings, the greater is the deformation. One who is not open to love in its essence and in its truth cannot approach the Divine.

Even the seekers through knowledge come to a point beyond which if they want to go farther, they are bound to find themselves entering at the same time into love and to feel the two as one, knowledge the light of the divine union, love the very heart of knowledge. There is a place in the soul's progress where they meet and you cannot distinguish one from the other. The division, the distinction between the two that you make in the beginning are a creation of the mind: once you rise to a higher level, they disappear.

Among those who have come into this world seeking to reveal the Divine here and transform earthly life, there are some who have manifested the Divine love in a greater fullness. In some the purity of the manifestation is so great that they are misunderstood by the whole of humanity and are even accused of being hard and unloving,

although the Divine love is there. But it is in them divine and not human in its form as in its substance.

For when man speaks of love, he associates it with an emotional and sentimental weakness. But the divine intensity of self-forgetfulness, the capacity of throwing oneself out entirely, making no restriction and no reservation, as a gift, asking nothing in exchange, this is little known to human beings. And when it is there unmixed with weak and sentimental emotions, they find it hard and cold; they cannot recognise in it the very highest and most intense power of love.

## **Manifestation of the Divine Love**

The manifestation of the love of the Divine in the world was the great holocaust, the supreme self-giving. The Perfect Consciousness accepted to be merged and absorbed into the unconsciousness of matter, so that consciousness might be awakened in the depths of its obscurity and little by little a Divine Power might rise in it and make the whole of this manifested universe a highest expression of the Divine Consciousness and the Divine love.

This was the supreme love, to accept the loss of the perfect condition of supreme divinity, its absolute consciousness, its infinite knowledge, to unite with unconsciousness, to dwell in the world with ignorance and darkness. And yet none perhaps would call it love; for it does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice.

The force of love in the world is trying to find consciousnesses that are capable of receiving this divine movement in its purity and expressing it. This race of all beings towards love, this irresistible

push and seeking out in the world's heart and in all hearts, is the impulse given by a Divine love behind the human longing and seeking. It touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing; but this constant touch prepares these instruments and suddenly one day there will awake in them the capacity of self-giving, the capacity of loving.

The movement of love is not limited to human beings and it is perhaps less distorted in other worlds than in the human. Look at the flowers and trees.

When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibers up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing, — a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again.

There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmanifested here. Once you have come in contact with this large, pure and true Divine love, if you have felt it even for a short time and in its smallest form, you will realise what an abject thing human desire has made of it.

It has become in human nature something low, brutal, selfish, violent, ugly, or else it is something weak and sentimental, made up of the pettiest feeling, brittle, superficial, exacting. And this baseness and brutality or this self-regarding weakness they call love!

# Vital – The Indispensable Agent to Manifest Divine Love

*Question: Is our vital being to take part in the Divine love? If it does, what is the right and correct form of participation it should take?*

**The Mother:** Where is the manifestation of Divine love intended to stop? Is it to be confined to some unreal or immaterial region? Divine love plunges its manifestation upon earth down into the most material matter. It does not indeed find itself in the selfish distortions of the human consciousness; but the vital in itself is as important an element in Divine love as it is in the whole of the manifested universe.

There is no possibility of movement and progress without the mediation of the vital; but because this Power of Nature has been so badly distorted, some prefer to believe that it has to be pulled out altogether and thrown away. But it is only through the vital that matter can be touched by the transforming power of the Spirit. If the vital is not there to infuse its dynamism and living force, matter will remain dead; for the higher parts of the being will not come into contact with earth, will not be concretised in life, and they will depart unsatisfied and disappear.

The Divine love of which I speak is a Love that manifests here upon this physical earth, in matter, but it must be pure of its human distortions, if it is to incarnate. The vital is an indispensable agent in this as in all manifestation.

But as has happened always, the adverse powers have put their hold on this most precious thing. It is the energy of the vital that enters into dull and insensitive matter and makes it responsive and alive. But the adverse forces have distorted it; they have turned it into a field of

violence and selfishness and desire and every kind of ugliness and prevented it from taking part in the divine work.

The one thing to be done is to change it, not to suppress its movement or destroy it. For without it no intensity is possible anywhere. The vital is in its very nature that in us which can give itself away. Just because it is that which has always the impulse and the strength to take, it is also that which is capable of giving itself to the utmost; because it knows how to possess, it knows also how to abandon itself without reserve. The true vital movement is the most beautiful and magnificent of movements; but it has been twisted and turned into the most ugly, the most distorted, the most repulsive.

Wherever into a human story of love, there has entered even an atom of pure love and it has been allowed to manifest without too much distortion, we find a true and beautiful thing. And if the movement does not last, it is because it is not conscious of its own aim and seeking; it has not the knowledge that it is not the union of one being with another that it is seeking after but the union of all beings with the Divine.

## **Love alone can unite earth with the Supreme**

Love is a supreme force which the Eternal Consciousness sent down from itself into an obscure and darkened world that it might bring back that world and its beings to the Divine. The material world in its darkness and ignorance had forgotten the Divine. Love came into the darkness; it awakened all that lay there asleep; it whispered, opening the ears that were sealed, “There is something that is worth waking to, worth living for, and it is love!”

And with the awakening to love there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. The creation moves upward through love towards the Divine and in answer there leans downward to meet the creation the Divine Love and Grace.

Love cannot exist in its pure beauty, love cannot put on its native power and intense joy of fullness until there is this interchange, this fusion between the earth and the Supreme, this movement of Love from the Divine to the creation and from the creation to the Divine.

This world was a world of dead matter, till Divine love descended into it and awakened it to life. Ever since it has gone in search of this divine source of life, but it has taken in its search every kind of wrong turn and mistaken way, it has wandered hither and thither in the dark. The mass of this creation has moved on its road like the blind seeking for the unknown, seeking but ignorant of what it sought.

The maximum it has reached is what seems to human beings love in its highest form, its purest and most disinterested kind, like the love of the mother for the child. This human movement of love is secretly seeking for something else than what it has yet found; but it does not know where to find it, it does not even know what it is.

The moment man's consciousness awakens to the Divine love, pure, independent of all manifestation in human forms, he knows for what his heart has all the time been truly longing. That is the beginning of the Soul's aspiration, that brings the awakening of the consciousness and its yearning for union with the Divine.

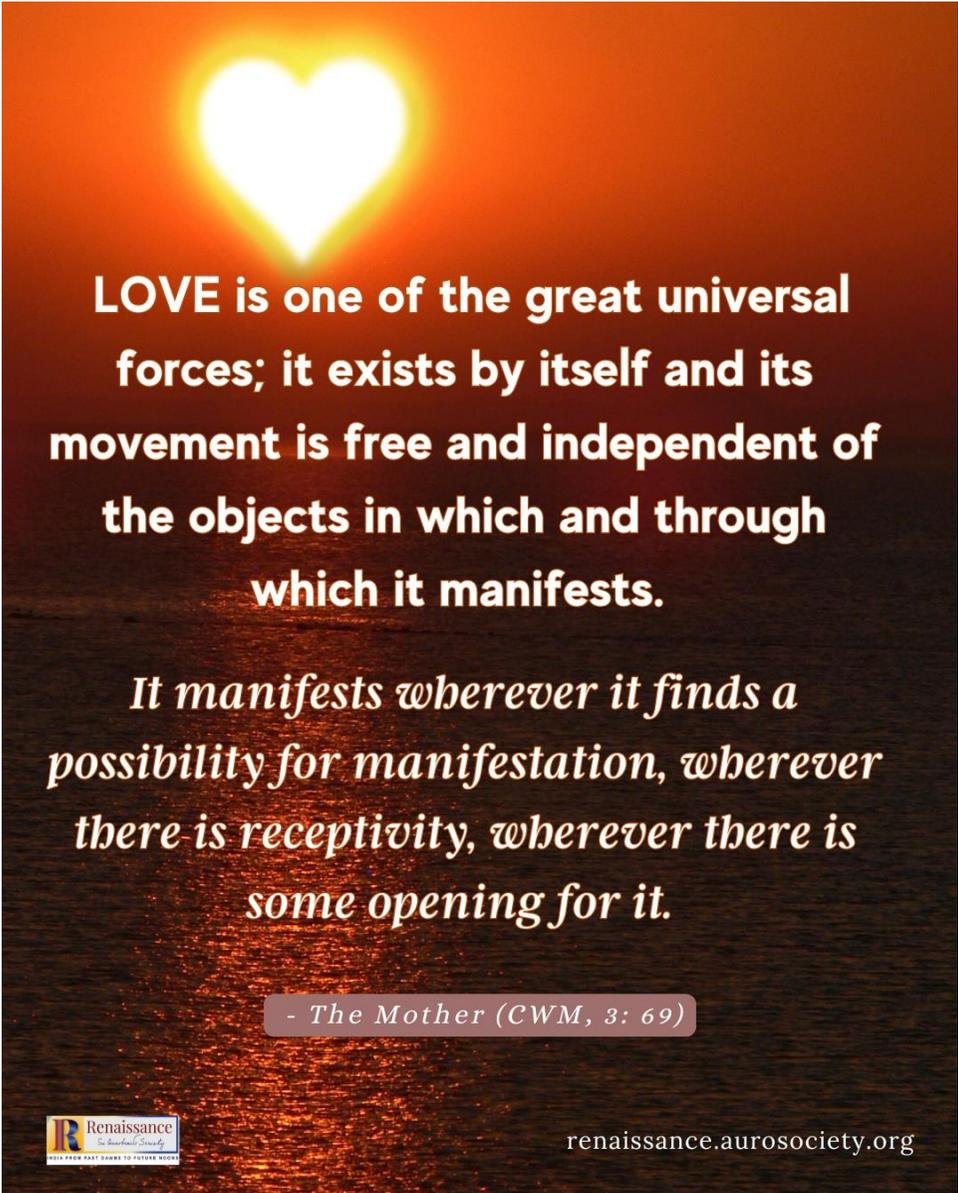
All the forms that are of the ignorance, all the deformations it has imposed must from that moment fade and disappear and give place to one single movement of the creation answering to the Divine love by its love for the Divine.

Once the creation is conscious, awakened, opened to love for the Divine, the Divine love pours itself without limit back into the creation. The circle of the movement turns back upon itself and the ends meet; there is the joining of the extremes, supreme Spirit and manifesting Matter, and their divine union becomes constant and complete.

Great beings have taken birth in this world who came to bring down here something of the sovereign purity and power of Divine love. The Divine love has thrown itself into a personal form in them that its realisation upon earth may be at once more easy and more perfect. Divine love, when manifested in a personal being, is easier to realise; it is more difficult when it is unmanifested or impersonal in its movement.

A human being, awakened by this personal touch, with this personal intensity, to the consciousness of the Divine love, will find his work and change made more easy; the union for which he seeks becomes more natural and close. And the union, the realisation will become for him, too, more full, more perfect; for the wide uniformity of a universal and impersonal Love will be lit up and vivified with the colour and beauty of all possible relations with the Divine.



A glowing heart shape is centered in the upper half of the image, set against a vibrant sunset sky with orange and red hues. Below the heart, the sun's reflection creates a shimmering path on the dark water surface.

**LOVE is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests.**

*It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it.*

- *The Mother (CWM, 3: 69)*

# Relations Between Men and Women in Integral Yoga

*Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*

**Editor's note:** We feature some helpful guidance from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the complexity of man-woman relationship, especially when one or both the individuals also aspire for a spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother always emphasised each case is different, and their guidance was directed to the specific context of each individual's inner aspiration. Nonetheless, there are several nuggets of wisdom that are helpful to a vast number of aspirants.

## **The ideal and the way of attainment<sup>5</sup>**

The ideal of the Yoga is that all should be centred in and around the Divine and the life of the sadhaks must be founded on that firm foundation, their personal relations also should have the Divine for their centre.

Moreover, all relations should pass from the vital to the spiritual basis with the vital only as a form and instrument of the spiritual;—this means that from whatever relations they have with each other all jealousy, strife, hatred, aversion, rancour and other evil vital feelings should be abandoned, for they can be no part of the spiritual life.

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<sup>5</sup> CWSA 31: 288-289

So also all egoistic love and attachment will have to disappear—the love that loves only for the ego's sake and as soon as the ego is hurt and dissatisfied ceases to love or even cherishes rancour and hate. There must be a real living and lasting unity behind the love. It is understood of course that such things as sexual impurity must disappear also.

That is the ideal, but as for the way of attainment, it may differ for different people.

- One way is that in which one leaves everything else to follow the Divine alone. This does not mean an aversion for anybody any more than it means aversion for the world and life. It only means absorption in one's central aim, with the idea that once that is attained it will be easy to found all relations on the true basis, to become truly united with others in the heart and the spirit and the life, united in the spiritual truth and in the Divine.
- The other way is to go forward from where one is, seeking the Divine centrally and subordinating all else to that, but not putting everything else aside, rather seeking to transform gradually and progressively whatever is capable of such transformation. All the things that are not wanted in the relation,—impurity, jealousy, anger, egoistic demand,—drop away as the inner being grows purer and is replaced by the unity of soul with soul and the binding together of the social life in the hoop of the Divine.

## Friendship not forbidden<sup>6</sup>

It is certainly easier to have friendship between man and man or between woman and woman than between man and woman, because there the sexual intrusion is normally absent. In a friendship between man and woman the sexual turn can at any moment come in in a subtle or a direct way and produce perturbations.

But there is no impossibility of friendship between man and woman pure of this element; such friendships can exist and have always existed. All that is needed is that the lower vital should not look in at the back door or be permitted to enter.

There is often a harmony between a masculine and a feminine nature, an attraction or an affinity which rests on something other than any open or covert lower vital (sexual) basis—it depends sometimes predominantly on the mental or on the psychic or on the higher vital, sometimes on a mixture of these for its substance. In such cases friendship is natural and there is little chance of other elements coming in to pull it downwards or break it.

It is also a mistake to think that the vital alone has warmth and the psychic is something frigid without any flame in it. . . . Psychic love can have a warmth and a flame as intense and more intense than the vital, only it is a pure fire, not dependent on the satisfaction of ego-desire or on the eating up of the fuel it embraces. It is a white flame, not a red one; but white heat is not inferior to the red variety in its ardour.

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<sup>6</sup> CWSA 31: 306-308

It is true that the psychic love does not usually get its full play in human relations and human nature, it finds the fullness of its fire and ecstasy more easily when it is lifted towards the Divine.

In the human relation the psychic love gets mixed up with other elements which seek at once to use it and overshadow it. It gets an outlet for its own full intensities only at rare moments. Otherwise it comes in only as an element, but even so it contributes all the higher things in a love that is predominantly vital—all the finer sweetness, tenderness, fidelity, self-giving, self-sacrifice, reachings of soul to soul, idealising sublimations that lift up human love beyond itself come from the psychic.

If it could dominate and govern and transmute the other elements, mental, vital, physical, of human love, then love could be on the earth some reflection or preparation of the real thing, an integral union of the soul and its instruments in a dual life. But even some imperfect appearance of that is rare.

Here we do not talk of psychic love between sadhaks, for the reason that that comes usually to be employed as a cover and excuse for things that are not at all psychic and have no place in the spiritual life.

Our view is that the normal thing is in Yoga for the entire flame of the nature to turn towards the Divine and the rest must wait for the true basis; to build higher things on the sand and mire of the ordinary consciousness is not safe. That does not necessarily exclude friendships or comradeships, but these must be subordinate altogether to the central fire.

If anyone makes meanwhile the relation with the Divine his one absorbing aim, that is quite natural and gives the full force to the sadhana. Psychic love finds itself wholly when it is the radiation of

the diviner consciousness for which we are seeking; till then it is difficult for it to put out its undimmed integral self and figure.

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As for turning all to the Divine, that is a counsel of perfection for those who don't care to carry any luggage. But otherwise friendship between man and man or man and woman or woman and woman is not forbidden provided it is the true thing and sex does not come in and also provided it does not turn one away from the goal. If the central aim is strong, that is sufficient.

When I spoke of personal relation I certainly did not mean pure indifference, for indifference does not create a relation: it tends to non-relation altogether. Emotional friendship need not be an obstacle.

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The only relation permissible between a sadhak and sadhika here is the same as between a sadhak and sadhak or between a sadhika and sadhika—a friendly relation between followers of the same path of Yoga and children of the Mother.

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In a general way the only method for succeeding in having between a man and a woman the free and natural Yogic relations that should exist between a sadhak and a sadhika in this Yoga is to be able to meet each other without thinking at all that one is a man and another a woman—both are simply human beings, both sadhaks, both striving to serve the Divine and seeking the Divine alone and none else. Have that fully in yourself and no difficulty is likely to come.

## **Marriage and Sadhana – Each Case is Different<sup>7</sup>**

It is not helpful to abandon the ordinary life before the being is ready for the full spiritual life. To do so means to precipitate a struggle between the different elements and exasperate it to a point of intensity which the nature is not ready to bear. The vital elements in you have partly to be met by the discipline and experience of life, while keeping the spiritual aim in view and trying to govern life by it progressively in the spirit of Karmayoga. It is for this reason that we gave our approval to your marriage.

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If she consents to marry, that would be the best. All these vital disturbances proceed from suppressed sex-instinct, suppressed but not rejected and overcome. A mental acceptance or enthusiasm for the sadhana is not a sufficient guarantee nor a sufficient ground for calling people, especially young people, to begin it.

Afterwards these vital instincts rise up and there is nothing sufficient to balance or prevail against them, only mental ideas which do not prevail against the instinct but on the other hand also stand in the way of their natural social means of satisfaction. If she marries now and gets experience of the human vital life, then hereafter there may be a chance of her mental aspiration for sadhana turning into the real thing.

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As to the question of marriage in general, we do not consider it advisable for one who desires to come to the spiritual life. Marriage means usually any amount of trouble, heavy burdens, a bondage to the

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<sup>7</sup> CWSA 31: 543-544

worldly life and great difficulties in the way of single-minded spiritual endeavour. Its only natural purpose would be, if the sexual trend was impossible to conquer, to give it a restricted and controlled satisfaction. . .

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It is not right once you have turned to the Divine, to allow despondency of any kind to take hold of you. Whatever the difficulties and troubles, you must keep this confidence that by relying on the Divine, the Divine will take you through.

Now I answer the questions you put to me in your letter.

1) If to follow the spiritual path is your resolve, marriage and family life can only come across it. Marriage would be the right thing only if the sexual push was so strong that there was no hope of overcoming it except by a controlled and rational indulgence for some time during which it could be slowly brought under subjection to the will. But you say its hold on you is diminishing, so that does not seem indispensable.

2) As for leaving all and coming away from there that must be only when there is a clear and settled decision within you. To do so on an impulse would be to feel all the pull of old things after you come here and entail severe disturbance and struggle in the sadhana. When the other things fall away or are cut away from you then it can be done. Persist in your aspiration, insist on your vital to have faith and be more quiet. It will come.

## Marriage as a True Union<sup>8</sup>

To unite your physical lives, your material interests, to become partners in order to face together the difficulties and successes, the defeats and victories of life—that is the very foundation of marriage, but you already know that it is not enough.

To be united in your sensations, to have the same aesthetic tastes and enjoyments, to be moved in common by the same things, one through the other and one for the other—that is good, that is necessary, but it is not enough.

To be one in your deeper feelings, to keep a mutual affection and tenderness that never vary in spite of all the blows of life and can withstand every weariness and irritation and disappointment, to be always and on every occasion happy, extremely happy, to be together, to find in every circumstance tranquility, peace and joy in each other—that is good, that is very good, that is indispensable, but it is not enough.

To unite your minds, to harmonise your thoughts and make them complementary, to share your intellectual preoccupations and discoveries; in short, to make your sphere of mental activity identical through a widening and enrichment acquired by both at once—that is good, that is absolutely necessary, but it is not enough.

Beyond all that, in the depths, at the centre, at the summit of the being, there is a Supreme Truth of being, an Eternal Light, independent of all the circumstances of birth, country, environment, education; That is the origin, cause and master of our spiritual development; it is That which gives a permanent direction to our lives; it is That which

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<sup>8</sup> CWM 14: 291

determines our destinies; it is in the consciousness of That that you must unite.

To be one in aspiration and ascension, to move forward at the same pace on the same spiritual path, that is the secret of a lasting union.

## **Loneliness<sup>9</sup>**

The inner loneliness can only be cured by the inner experience of union with the Divine; no human association can fill the void. In the same way, for the spiritual life the harmony with others must be founded not on mental and vital affinities, but on the divine consciousness and the union with the Divine.

When one finds the Divine and finds others in the Divine, then the real harmony comes. Meanwhile what there can be is the goodwill and unity founded on the feeling of a common divine goal and the sense of being all children of the Mother. Real harmony can come only on a psychic or a spiritual basis.

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To be alone with the Divine is the highest of all privileged states for the sadhak, for it is that in which inwardly he comes nearest to the Divine and can make all existence a communion in the chamber of the heart as well as in the temple of the universe.

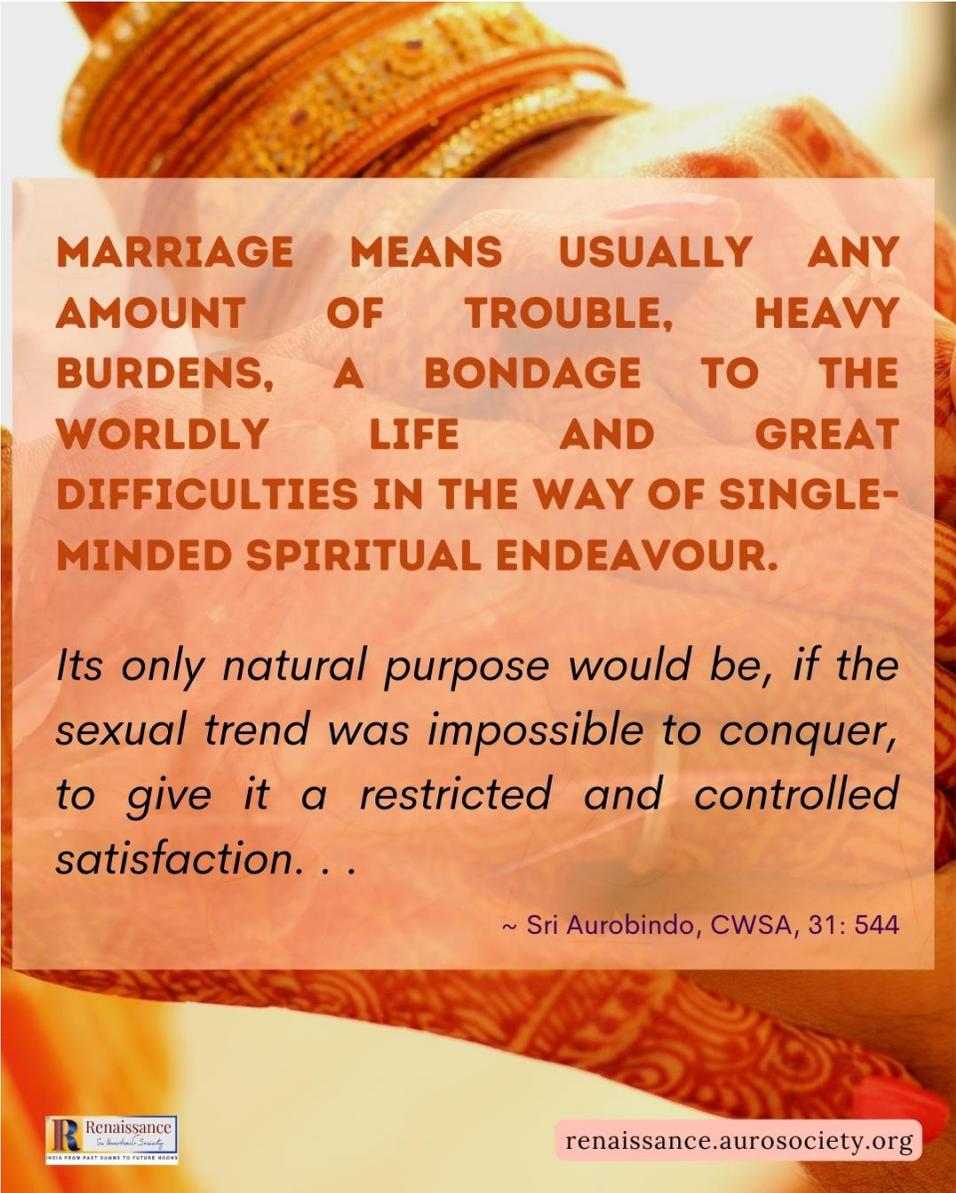
Moreover that is the beginning and base of the real oneness with all, for it establishes that oneness in its true base, on the Divine, for it is in the Divine that he meets and unites with all and no longer in a

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<sup>9</sup> CWSA 31: 310-311

precarious interchange of the mental and vital ego. So do not fear loneliness but put your trust in the Mother and go forward on the Path in her strength and Grace.





**MARRIAGE MEANS USUALLY ANY AMOUNT OF TROUBLE, HEAVY BURDENS, A BONDAGE TO THE WORLDLY LIFE AND GREAT DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF SINGLE-MINDED SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOUR.**

*Its only natural purpose would be, if the sexual trend was impossible to conquer, to give it a restricted and controlled satisfaction. . .*

~ Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 31: 544

# Family Relations in Yoga

*Sri Aurobindo*

**Editor's Note:** In these selected passages, Sri Aurobindo elucidates that one of the aims in Integral Yoga is to purify and transform the usual egoistic human love into a purer love towards the Divine at all levels of the being. He also explains that after one enters the spiritual life, the relationship with the Divine takes precedence over the ordinary social relations. Either the family relations naturally fall off or become the ground for *karmayoga* based on the soul's need.

## Consciousness at the basis of human relations<sup>10</sup>

Absence of love and fellow-feeling is not necessary for nearness to the Divine; on the contrary, a sense of closeness and oneness with others is a part of the divine consciousness into which the sadhak enters by nearness to the Divine and the feeling of oneness with the Divine.

An entire rejection of all relations is indeed the final aim of the Mayavadin, and in the ascetic Yoga an entire loss of all relations of friendship and affection and attachment to the world and its living beings would be regarded as a promising sign of advance towards liberation, *Moksha*; but even there, I think, a feeling of oneness and unattached spiritual sympathy for all is at least a penultimate stage, like the compassion of the Buddhist, before the turning to *Moksha* or *Nirvana*.

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<sup>10</sup> CWSA 31: 285-286

In this Yoga the feeling of unity with others, love, universal joy and Ananda are an essential part of the liberation and perfection which are the aim of the sadhana.

On the other hand, human society, human friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling are mostly and usually—not entirely or in all cases—founded on a vital basis and are ego-held at their centre.

It is because of the pleasure of being loved, the pleasure of enlarging the ego by contact, mutual penetration of spirit, with another, the exhilaration of the vital interchange which feeds their personality that men usually love—and there are also other and still more selfish motives that mix with this essential movement.

There are of course higher spiritual, psychic, mental, vital elements that come in or can come in; but the whole thing is very mixed, even at its best. This is the reason why at a certain stage with or without apparent reason the world and life and human society and relations and philanthropy (which is as ego-ridden as the rest) begin to pall.

There is sometimes an ostensible reason—a disappointment of the surface vital, the withdrawal of affection by others, the perception that those loved or men generally are not what one thought them to be and a host of other causes; but often the cause is a secret disappointment of some part of the inner being, not translated or not well translated into the mind, because it expected from these things something which they cannot give.

It is the case with many who turn or are pushed to the spiritual life. For some it takes the form of a *vairāgya* which drives them towards ascetic indifference and gives the urge towards Moksha.

For us, what we hold to be necessary is that the mixture should disappear and that the consciousness should be established on a purer

level (not only spiritual and psychic but a purer and higher mental, vital, physical consciousness) in which there is not this mixture.

There one would feel the true Ananda of oneness and love and sympathy and fellowship, spiritual and self-existent in its basis but expressing itself through the other parts of the nature.

If that is to happen, there must obviously be a change; the old form of these movements must drop off and leave room for a new and higher self to disclose its own way of expression and realisation of itself and of the Divine through these things—that is the inner truth of the matter.

## **Relations that Interfere with Spiritual Progress<sup>11</sup>**

Relations which are part of the ordinary vital nature in human life are of no value in the spiritual life—they rather interfere with the progress; for the mind and vital also should be wholly turned towards the Divine.

Moreover, the purpose of sadhana is to enter into a spiritual consciousness and base everything on a new spiritual basis which can only be done when one has entered into complete unity with the Divine. Meanwhile one has to have a calm goodwill for all, but relations of a vital kind do not help—for they keep the consciousness down on a vital basis and prevent its rising to a higher level.

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<sup>11</sup> CWSA 31: 283-284

The love which human beings feel for one another is also usually an egoistic vital love and these other movements, claim, demand, jealousy, abhiman, anger etc., are its common accompaniments. There is no place for them in Yoga—nor in true love, psychic or divine.

In Yoga all love should be turned towards the Divine and to human or other beings only as vessels of the Divine—abhiman and the rest should have no place in it.

## **Family Duties and Yoga<sup>12</sup>**

. . . Relations after taking up Yoga should be less and less based on a physical origin or the habits of the physical consciousness and more and more on the basis of sadhana—of sadhak with sadhaks, of others as souls travelling the same path or children of the Mother than in the ordinary way or with the old viewpoint.

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When one enters the spiritual life, the family ties which belong to the ordinary nature fall away—one becomes indifferent to the old things. This indifference is a release. There need be no harshness in it at all. To remain tied to the old physical affections would mean to remain tied to the ordinary nature and that would prevent the spiritual progress.

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<sup>12</sup> CWSA 31: 291-292

Human physical relations are necessarily temporary—the soul has to go away and prepare itself for other lives through which it will move eventually nearer to the Divine.

Regard it so and open yourself to the peace from above; turn yourself towards that which is Eternal and Divine.

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. . . If you want to practise Yoga, you must be able to live in the world, so long as you are there, with a mind set upon the Divine and not bound by the environment. One who does this, can help those around him a hundred times more than one who is bound and attached to the world.

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The question about the family duties can be answered in this way—the family duties exist so long as one is in the ordinary consciousness of the *grahasthan*; if the call to a spiritual life comes, whether one keeps to them or not depends partly upon the way of Yoga one follows, partly on one's own spiritual necessity.

There are many who pursue inwardly the spiritual life and keep the family duties, not as social duties but as a field for the practice of karmayoga, others abandon everything to follow the spiritual call or line and they are justified if that is necessary for the Yoga they practise or if that is the imperative demand of the soul within them.

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There is no harm in devoting yourself to occupations which will help the sadhana. The earning of money and family affairs have only to be looked after if the circumstances are such as to compel it. They should

then be done in a spirit of entire detachment, dealing with them so as to develop in oneself the consciousness described in the Gita.

## **Relations Between Parents and Children<sup>13</sup>**

There are many kinds of truth and in the *Shastra* you will find all kinds, some seeming in conflict with others. Service to parents is part of family and social duty. It has nothing to do in itself with Yoga. Yoga is truth not of family or society, but of spiritual life, and in spiritual life the seeking for the Divine takes precedence of everything.

If we ask you to remain still with your father and mother, it is not from the point of view of Truth, but of charity. Four of their children have already left them to come to the Asram; it would be too hard a blow if you also left them now. As you have remained with them so long, you might remain a little longer. Even while in the family, you can prepare yourself for the spiritual life, by remembering the Divine in all you do and by doing it as a sacrifice for the sake of the Divine.

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It [*a child's debt to his parents*] is a law of human society, not a law of Karma. The child did not ask the father to bring him into the world—and if the father has done it for his own pleasure, it is the least he can do to bring up the child.

All these are social relations (and it is not at all a one-sided debt of the child to the father, either), but whatever they are, they cease once one takes to the spiritual life. For the spiritual life does not at all rest on

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<sup>13</sup> CWSA 31: 293-294

the external physical relations; it is the Divine alone with whom one has then to do.

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The attachment to parents belongs to the ordinary physical nature—it has nothing to do with Divine Love.

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The inner being turned to the Divine naturally draws away from old vital relations and outer movements and contacts till it can bring a new consciousness into the external being.



**...the family duties exist so long  
as one is in the ordinary  
consciousness of the *grahasthan*;  
if the call to a spiritual life comes, whether  
one keeps to them or not depends partly  
upon the way of Yoga one follows, partly  
on one's own spiritual necessity.**

- Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 31: 292)

# Friendship and Affection in the Path of Sadhana

*Sri Aurobindo*

**Editor's note:** Here we highlight a few letters of Sri Aurobindo in which he guides the sadhaks on the right place of friendship and affection in the path of Integral Yoga. Extremely helpful is his penetrating insight into the nature of human love that is primarily a movement of the vital ego.

## Not an ascetic Yoga<sup>14</sup>

All are not indifferent in this Asram to each other, nor is friendship or affection excluded from the Yoga. Friendship with the Divine is a recognised relation in the sadhana. Friendships between the sadhaks exist and are encouraged by the Mother. Only we seek to found them on a surer basis than that on which the bulk of human friendships are insecurely founded.

It is precisely because we hold friendship, brotherhood, love to be sacred things that we want this change—because we do not want to see them broken at every moment by the movements of the ego, soiled and spoiled and destroyed by the passions, jealousies, treacheries to which the vital is prone—it is to make them truly sacred and secure that we want them rooted in the soul, founded on the rock of the Divine.

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<sup>14</sup> CWSA 31: 294-295

Our Yoga is not an ascetic Yoga: it aims at purity, but not at a cold austerity. Friendship and love are indispensable notes in the harmony to which we aspire.

It is not a vain dream, for we have seen that even in imperfect conditions when a little of the indispensable element is there at the very root the thing is possible. It is difficult and the old obstacles still cling obstinately. But no victory can be won without a fixed fidelity to the aim and a long effort. There is no other way than to persevere.

### **All Attachments Have to be Given Up<sup>15</sup>**

In Yoga friendship can remain, but attachment has to fall away or any such engrossing affection as would keep one tied to the ordinary life and consciousness—human relations must take quite a small and secondary place and not interfere with the turn to the Divine.

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. . . in Yoga all attachments have to be given up so that there may be no rival to the Divine, but love and affection can be there—only as a new basis of consciousness has to be reached love and affection have to be rebased on that deeper and higher consciousness, not allowed to remain in their old form or on their old level—all the life must be centred round the Divine.

It is so in this Yoga at least. There are others in which a man must become aloof from all things, but that is when one is bound towards Nirvana.

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<sup>15</sup> CWSA 31: 295

## Human Affection is Unreliable<sup>16</sup>

Human affection is obviously unreliable because it is so much bound up with selfishness and desire; it is a flame of the ego sometimes turbid and misty, sometimes more clear and brightly coloured—sometimes tamasic based on instinct and habit, sometimes rajasic and fed by passion or the cry for vital interchange, sometimes more sattwic and trying to be or look to itself disinterested.

But fundamentally it depends on a personal need or a return of some kind inward or outward and when the need is not satisfied or the return ceases or is not given, it most often diminishes or dies or exists only as a tepid or troubled remnant of habit from the past or else turns for satisfaction elsewhere. The more intense it is, the more it is apt to be troubled by tumults, clashes, quarrels, egoistic disturbances of all kinds, selfishness, exactions, lapses even to rage and hatred, ruptures.

It is not that these affections cannot last—tamasic instinctive affections last because of habit in spite of everything dividing the persons, e.g. certain family affections; rajasic affections can last sometimes in spite of all disturbances and incompatibilities and furious ruptures because one has a vital need of the other and clings because of that or because both have that need and are constantly separating to return and returning to separate, or proceeding from quarrel to reconciliation and from reconciliation to quarrel; sattwic affections last very often from duty to the ideal or with some other support though they may lose their keenness or intensity or brightness.

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<sup>16</sup> CWSA 31: 296-297

But the true reliability is there only when the psychic element in human affection becomes strong enough to colour or dominate the rest.

For that reason friendship is or rather can oftenest be the most durable of the human affections because there is less interference of the vital and even though a flame of the ego it can be a quiet and pure fire giving always its warmth and light. Nevertheless reliable friendship is almost always with a very few; to have a horde of loving, unselfishly faithful friends is a phenomenon so rare that it can be safely taken as an illusion.

In any case human affection whatever its value has its place, because through it the psychic being gets the emotional experiences it needs until it is ready to prefer the true to the apparent, the perfect to the imperfect, the divine to the human. As the consciousness has to rise to a higher level, so the activities of the heart also have to rise to that higher level and change their basis and character.

Yoga is the founding of all the life and consciousness in the Divine, so also love and affection must be rooted in the Divine and a spiritual and psychic oneness in the Divine must be their foundation—to reach the Divine first leaving other things aside or to seek the Divine alone is the straight road towards that change.

That means no attachment—it need not mean turning affection into disaffection or chill indifference.

## Vital Love Does Not Last<sup>17</sup>

It is meant [*by not retaining vital relations*] that you should have the relation of sadhaks with each other, one of goodwill and friendly feeling, but not any special relation of a vital character. If there is anyone you cannot meet without such a vital relation coming up, then only it is not advisable to meet him or her.

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It is the ordinary nature of vital love not to last or, if it tries to last, not to satisfy, because it is a passion which Nature has thrown in in order to serve a temporary purpose; it is good enough therefore for a temporary purpose and its normal tendency is to wane when it has sufficiently served Nature's purpose.

In mankind, as man is a more complex being, she calls in the aid of imagination and idealism to help her push, gives a sense of ardour, of beauty and fire and glory, but all that wanes after a time. It cannot last, because it is all a borrowed light and power, borrowed in the sense of being a reflection caught from something beyond and not native to the reflecting vital medium which imagination uses for the purpose.

Moreover nothing lasts in the mind and vital, all is in a flux there. The one thing that endures is the soul, the spirit. Therefore love can last or satisfy only if it bases itself on the soul and spirit, if it has its roots there. But that means living no longer in the vital but in the soul and spirit.

The difficulty of the vital giving up is because the vital is not governed by reason or knowledge, but by instinct and impulse and the desire of

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<sup>17</sup> CWSA 31: 297-301

pleasure. It draws back because it is disappointed, because it realises that the disappointment will always repeat itself, but it does not realise that the whole thing is in itself a glamour or, if it does, it repines that it should be so.

Where the vairagya is sattwic, born not of disappointment but of the sense of greater and truer things to be attained, this difficulty does not arise. However the vital can learn by experience, can learn so much as to turn away from its regret of the beauty of the will-o'-the-wisp. Its vairagya can become sattwic and decisive.

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There is nothing unusual in your feelings towards X. It is the way that vital love usually takes when there is no strong psychic force to correct and uphold it.

After the first vital glow is over, the incompatibility of the two egos begins to show itself and there is more and more strain in the relations — for one or both the demands of the other become intolerable to the vital part, there is constant irritation and the claim is felt as a burden and a yoke.

Naturally in a life of sadhana there is no room for vital relations— they are a stumbling block preventing the wholesale turning of the nature towards the Divine.

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The phenomenon of which you speak is normal to human nature. People are drawn together or one is drawn to another by a certain feeling of affinity, of agreement or of attraction between some part of one's own nature and some part of the other's nature.

At first this only is felt; one sees all that is good or pleasant to one in the other's nature and even attributes, perhaps, qualities to him that are not there or not so much there as one thinks. But with closer acquaintance other parts of the nature are felt with which one is not in affinity—perhaps there is a clash of ideas or opposition of feelings or conflict of two egos.

If there is a strong love or friendship of a lasting character, then one may overcome these difficulties of contact and arrive at a harmonising or accommodation; but very often this is not there or the disagreement is so acute as to counteract the tendency of accommodation or else the ego gets so hurt as to recoil.

Then it is quite possible for one to begin to see too much and exaggerate the faults of the other or to attribute things to him of a bad or unpleasant character that are not there. The whole view can change, the good feeling change into ill-feeling, alienation, even enmity or antipathy. This is always happening in human life. The opposite also happens, but less easily—i.e. the change from ill-feeling to good feeling, from opposition to harmony.

But of course ill-opinion or ill-feeling towards a person need not arise from this cause alone. It happens from many causes, instinctive dislike, jealousy, conflicting interests, etc.

One must try to look calmly on others, not overstress either virtues or defects, without ill-feeling or misunderstanding or injustice, with a calm mind and vision.

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The love in the vital or other parts is the true thing, good for the spiritual life, only when in the vital love is changed into a form of the

psychic love and becomes an instrument for the transformation of the soul's love, no longer for the desires of the ego which men call love.



# OUR YOGA IS NOT AN ASCETIC YOGA:

IT AIMS AT PURITY,  
BUT NOT AT A COLD AUSTERITY.

Friendship and love are  
indispensable notes in the  
harmony to which we aspire.

*Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 31: 295*



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# Sources of Disharmony in Human Relations

*Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*

**Editor's Note:** We present here selected passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which give us practical guidance on how to handle the sources of disharmony in human relations in daily life. These sources include narrowmindedness, dislike and fault-finding in others.

## **Reject All Feelings of Dislike<sup>18</sup>**

Only those who sympathize can help—surely also one should be able to see the faults of others without hatred. Hatred injures both parties, it helps none.

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It is this feeling of dislike that must have been the ground for the attack to come in. All feelings of dislike for other sadhaks should be absolutely rejected. Each has his own nature, his own difficulties and has to struggle out of them with the Divine Help. Defects and limitations in them should not be made a ground for dislike.

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<sup>18</sup> CWSA 31: 346-352

These things [*reasons for disliking someone*] are not sufficient to justify dislike. These dislikes come from some vital feeling and these reasons put forward by the mind are excuses, not the real cause.

This collaboration between the mind and the vital, the vital throwing up the wrong movement, the mind justifying it, is one of the chief difficulties in the way of getting rid of the vital deviations.

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All antagonism to other sadhaks or dislike of them should go. There should be a calm goodwill and charity to all, but no inner mixing or interchange. Liking and disliking always means interchange of influences.

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You can disapprove [*of what people say*], but there should be no feeling of dislike or disgust for the people. [. . .]

## **Quarrels and Clashes Not Part of Sadhana**

Quarrels and clashes are a proof of absence of the Yogic poise and those who seriously want to do Yoga must learn to grow out of these things.

It is easy enough not to clash when there is no cause for strife or dispute or quarrel; it is when there is cause and the other side is impossible and unreasonable that one gets the opportunity of rising above one's vital nature.

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Well, I have said already that quarrels, cuttings are not a part of sadhana; the clashes and friction that you speak of are, just as in the outside world, rubbings of the vital ego. Antagonisms, antipathies, dislikes, quarrellings can no more be proclaimed as part of sadhana than sex impulses or acts can be part of sadhana.

Harmony, goodwill, forbearance, equanimity are necessary ideals in the relation of sadhak with sadhak.

One is not bound to mix, but if one keeps to oneself, it should be for reasons of sadhana, not out of other motives,—moreover it should be without any sense of superiority or contempt for others.

. . . If somebody finds that association with another for any reason raises undesirable vital feelings in him or her, he or she can certainly withdraw from that association as a matter of prudence until he or she gets over the weakness.

But ostentation of avoidance, public cuttings etc. are not included in the necessity and betray feelings that equally ought to be overcome. There is a great confusion of thought about these things—for the vital gets in the way and disturbs the right view of things. It is only what is done sincerely with a sound spiritual motive that is proper to Yoga. The rest cannot be claimed as the working of a spiritual force mysteriously advancing its ends by ways contrary to its own nature.

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Yes—self-justification [*in a quarrel*] keeps the thing going because it gives a mental support. Self-justification is always a sign of ego and ignorance. When one has a wider consciousness, one knows that each one has his own way of looking at things and finds in that way his own justification, so that both parties in a quarrel believe themselves to be in the right. It is only when one looks from above in a

consciousness clear of ego that one sees all sides of a thing and also their real truth.

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These results [*unhappiness, dullness, obscurity*] are not a punishment, they are a natural result of yielding to egoism. All quarrels proceed from egoism which pushes its own opinion and affirms its own importance, considering that it is right and everybody else wrong and thus creates anger and sense of injury etc. These things must not be indulged, but rejected at once.

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Violence and blows are out of place in the Yoga. It is not by these means or by any physical or external impulsion or pressure that sadhana can be enforced but only by a psychic or other inner influence.

. . . self-control and self-mastery are necessary even in the ordinary life and still more necessary—quite indispensable—in Yoga.

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[. . .] there is only one Power at work and neither *Z* nor *Y* nor anybody else matters. Let each one open himself to the working of that Power in him and let there be no attempt at forming a body of sadhakas with somebody leading or intervening between the one Power and the sadhakas. In that way there will be no room for rivalry or collision between opposing vital egoisms.

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I am afraid that when vital passion disturbs the atmosphere, people very easily lose right perception and the sense of the thing that ought to be done, even those who are only or should be only onlookers. . .

For you, however, looking at it from your standpoint only, the best thing is not to brood on these things, but to turn away from the memory of them altogether; for brooding on them only prolongs the inner consequences of a mistaken, disturbing and painful movement. There is no need that you should apologize for anything; what we should advise is to bury the past episode and its mistakes and return to normal undisturbing relations.

Fix yourself more in an inner life and its opening to your soul's future.

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It is better not to involve oneself in the dispute and to leave the combatants to throw their brahmastras at each other, oneself safe in a calm and judicious indifference. It is also the attitude most helpful to the sadhana.

Of opinions and discussions there is no end and it is much better to remain inside and advance towards another light than the mind's—though there is more fire of a smoky kind than light in these discussions.

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It is not always possible in life and work to avoid friction and collision; but it can be minimized or deprived of its worst developments if one has a large understanding of the men around one with whom one has to deal and acts in that spirit.

If on the other hand one sticks to one's own position, done without regard for the standpoint of others, that creates resistance and friction.

## Fault-finding and Criticism

There is no harm in seeing and observing [*the behaviour of others*] if it is done with sympathy and impartiality—it is the tendency unnecessarily to criticise, find fault, condemn others (often quite wrongly) which creates a bad atmosphere both for oneself and others.

And why this harshness and cocksure condemnation? Has not each man his own faults—why should he be so eager to find fault with others and condemn them? Sometimes one has to judge but it should not be done hastily or in a censorious spirit.

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Men are always more able to criticise sharply the work of others and tell them how to do things or what not to do than skillful to avoid the same mistakes themselves. Often indeed one sees easily in others faults which are there in oneself but which one fails to see.

These and other defects such as the last you mention are common to human nature and few escape them. The human mind is not really conscious of itself—that is why in Yoga one has always to look and see what is in oneself and become more and more conscious.

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In ordinary life people always judge wrongly because they judge by mental standards and generally by conventional standards. The human mind is an instrument not of truth but of ignorance and error.

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It is the petty ego in each that likes to discover and talk about the (real or unreal) defects of others—and it does not matter whether they are real or unreal. The ego has no right to judge them, because it has not

the right view or the right spirit. It is only the calm, disinterested, dispassionate, all-compassionate and all-loving Spirit that can judge and see rightly the strength and the weakness in each being.

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. . . The lower vital takes a mean and petty pleasure in picking out the faults of others and thereby one hampers both one's own progress and that of the subject of the criticism.

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It is true that the habit of gossip and fault-finding with others does interfere because it brings down the consciousness from a higher to a lower level. But I do not think a retirement such as you propose is the way to cure it. It would only be suspended and the tendency come up again when you resumed free intercourse with others. It is on its field itself that it has to be first observed, then cured by detachment from it and rejection of it when it comes.

A partial retirement may sometimes be helpful for concentration,—but not for these things; there the only cure is what I suggest or else the descent of a higher consciousness to replace the present imperfect nature.

## **Widen Your Consciousness<sup>19</sup>**

The whole trouble comes from the fact that you cannot harmonize with someone unless he is in agreement with your own ideas and his opinion and way of doing things are in conformity with yours.

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<sup>19</sup> CWM 14: 266-268

You must widen your consciousness and understand that everyone has his own law. It is necessary to find the ground of understanding and harmony in a happy combination of individual wills and not to try that all may be the same in an identical will and action.

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One of the chief obstacles to the establishment of a progressive harmony is our eagerness to prove to an opponent that he is wrong and we are right.

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Among human beings, the most widely spread disease is mental narrowness. They understand only what is in their own consciousness and cannot tolerate anything else.

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For each problem there is a solution that can give satisfaction to everybody, but for finding this ideal solution each one must want it, instead of meeting the others with the will to enforce one's own preference.

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Enlarge your consciousness and aspire for the satisfaction of all.

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You see only your side of the question, but if you want to widen your consciousness it would be better to look from all sides impartially. Later you will discover that this attitude has great advantages.

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As long as you are *for* some and *against* others, you are necessarily *outside of the Truth*.



One of the chief obstacles to the establishment of a progressive harmony is our eagerness to **prove to an opponent that he is wrong and we are right.**

- The Mother (CWM, 14: 267)



# Insights on Love and Human Relationships

*Beloo Mehra*

**Editor's Note:** This essay weaves together some spiritual insights on love and human relationships from various works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother along with examples from Indian literary tradition. A longer version of this article was first published in *Sraddha*, Vol. 11 (4), April 2020, pp. 82-99.

## Introduction

Love and relationships are the root of all human life as lived in our familial and societal contexts. But ordinarily, most people do not take the trouble to examine and understand the nature of these two things. Life situations generally have a way of making people experience several different aspects of human love and relationships. And in the process one goes through a variety of emotions, ranging all the way from pleasure to pain, from passion to indifference, from happiness to sadness, from calmness to rage, and so on. Such ups and downs cause much turmoil in people's lives — outer and inner, and also lead to strained and troubled relationships.

A deeper awareness of the nature of human love and its expression through different relationships can prepare us to deal more effectively with inevitably shifting life situations. By becoming conscious observers of the various emotions — not all of which may necessarily be grounded in love — that fill up the space of our human relationships we can also avoid going through unnecessary turmoil in our outer lives and needless disturbances in our inner lives.

Generally in present times, much of what young people learn about love and relationships is through popular culture — fiction, films, television and social media. Most of the times such unfiltered exposure to a variety of influences, most of which are not necessarily educative but rather meant to stimulate the lower nature of the individual — instincts, passion, and sensations, can end up creating more confusing and muddled understanding.

We must examine the nature of human love and relationships using a deeper psycho-spiritual view. This has been given to us by the great yogis, sages, and seers who have not only explored the depths of human nature but have also raised themselves to the highest heights of consciousness. No human experience is insignificant in their wider view of life and existence. And that’s why we are able to find relevant insights on almost all aspects of life in their writings and teachings. Through this article I hope to highlight some of these insights as applicable to the topics of love and human relationships.

## **Love, a Universal Force**

What is the essential nature of love? Is there more than one kind of love? Is love a personal thing or something more universal in nature? What does it mean when people use the expression ‘falling in love’? The Mother describes love as one of the great universal forces. She explains:

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“...[love] exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it. What you call love and think

of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force.

“But because it is universal, it is not therefore an unconscious force; it is a supremely conscious Power. Consciously it seeks for its manifestation and realisation upon earth; consciously it chooses its instruments, awakens to its vibrations those who are capable of an answer, endeavours to realise in them that which is its eternal aim, and when the instrument is not fit, drops it and turns to look for others.

“Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love; they see their love come and grow and then it fades – or, it may be, endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement. But their sense in this of a personal experience all their own was an illusion. It was a wave from the everlasting sea of universal love.”<sup>20</sup>

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It is indeed quite liberating when we can see that love that we experience as an individual comes to us as a wave from an everlasting sea of universal love. A question then naturally arises — what does it mean to be receptive and open to the force of love? A related question is — how should an individual become a fit instrument for love to manifest through him or her?

Our sages have explained that the entire universe, this manifestation, is essentially an act of Love — Love of the Divine, the Perfect Consciousness. The manifestation of the love of the Divine in the

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<sup>20</sup> CWM, 3: 69

world is an act of supreme self-giving. But why does this act not seem like love to our ignorant minds?

Because such an act of supreme self-giving does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice, explains the Mother. And that truly is the what love is about — complete self-giving.

The love of the Supreme for its creation is a movement to help awaken in the world a longing to get back to its essential divinity. In human terms, it means that love is a force that awakens in us a yearning to get to our true source, that deep oneness within. This for a long, long time is expressed through loving another human being. No matter how distorted or deformed human love is due to human egoism and the imperfections of the human nature, at its deepest depth lies the longing for uniting with the Divine.

## **What Does Love Seek?**

According to Sri Aurobindo, love seeks for two things — eternity and intensity. He adds that this seeking for eternity and intensity is instinctive and self-born in the relation of the Lover and Beloved<sup>21</sup>. This relation of the yearning of the human soul for the Supreme Beloved is the basis of the Vaishnava religion.

We see such seeking of love also manifesting in the human lovers. When one first falls in love with another, that love is highly intense at the beginning. And of course, never for a moment does the person think that this love will not last forever. The common phrase “happily ever after” is reflective of this seeking for eternity and intensity.

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<sup>21</sup> CWSA 24: 569

We find one beautiful example of this in the Ramayana. In Aranya Kanda Rishi Valmiki describes Rama's lament for Sita after she is kidnapped.

*As Rama was returning (to the hermitage), his left eye throbbed repeatedly and he stumbled and his body trembled.*

*As inauspicious omens appeared again and again, doubting if all is well with Sita, he said to himself, Can Sita be safe? Anxious to see Sita, he hastened to the hermitage and finding it empty, became restless.*

*Rama, the delight of the Raghu dynasty, hurtled in, turning round, throwing his hands to and fro, casting his looks all around the cottage where she used to move. The cottage, devoid of Sita looked like a lotus pond, the beauty of its lotuses destroyed by winter.*

*The trees with flowers withered, the animals and birds turned pale looked as if they were weeping. Bereft of their beauty they wore a ruinous look. The sylvan deities had left. The deerskin and kusa grass were strewn here and there, the grass cushions and straw mats lay scattered. Seeing his cottage so desolate Rama wept again and again.*

*'Timid Sita might have been abducted or dead or crushed or eaten up by demons. Or, she may be hiding for protection in the forest.'*

*'Maybe she has gone to pluck flowers or fruits. Or to the lotus pond or river to fetch water.'*

*He ransacked the forest, yet did not find his beloved. He appeared like a mad man, his eyes turned red with tears of sorrow.*

*Running from tree to tree, hill to hill, and river to river and weeping, Rama was immersed in a sea of sorrow.*

*O Kadamba tree, tell me if you have seen my beloved with a fair face and with love for kadamba flowers.*

*O Bilva tree, tell me if you have seen a lady delicate like your tender leaf, dressed in yellow silk, a lady whose breasts are round like Bilva fruits.*

*O Arjuna tree, tell me if you know a timid lady, daughter of Janaka and my beloved, fond of Arjuna tree. Is she living or not?*

*This Kakubha tree rich with tender leaves and flowers (perhaps) knows Maithili whose thighs are beautiful like the trunk of the Kakubha tree.*

*This great Tilaka tree round which bees bumble surely knows the lady who loves to put tilaka marks on the forehead.*

*O Ashoka tree, dispeller of sorrow, by quickly showing me my darling make me ashoka (free from sorrow) as I am grief stricken at heart.*

*O Palmyra tree be kind to me and tell me if you have seen*

*my beautiful beloved who has breasts like ripe palmyra fruit?*

*O Jambu tree, do not hesitate to tell me if you know Sita whose body shines lovely like gold.*

*O Karnikara tree with flowers in full bloom, tell me if you have seen my faithful beloved who is fond of karnikara flowers.*

*Renowned Rama, like a madman confused, approached the Mango, Kadamba, Sal and Jackfruit, Dhava, Champak, Ketaki trees and Pomegranate, Jasmine and Madhavi creepers, in order to make similar queries.*

*Or, O deer do you know about Maithili who has the eyes of a fawn? My beloved who has the restless eyes of a doe may be found in their company.*

*O elephant tell me if you have seen her whose thighs are like the trunk of an elephant. O best of elephants, tell me if you know her.*

*O tiger tell me freely and fearlessly if you have seen my beloved princess from Mithila with a face like the moon.*

*O lotus eyed darling, why are you running away? I have already seen you. Why are you hiding behind trees and not replying to me?*

*O my beautiful beloved, stay, stay Have you no compassion for me? You are so fond of fun. Why do you avoid me?*

*O lady of lovely complexion, I can see your yellow silk (flying), while you are running away. If you have love for me, stay on.*

*O lady with a sweet smile I have never hurt you. When I am in difficulty it does not behove you to ignore me.*

*It is clear that separated from me, the body of my young beloved is torn off and eaten away by carnivorous demons.*

*Her beautiful face with her sparkling teeth and lips, well-shaped nose, shining earrings has been like the full moon, eclipsed and rendered pale.*

*That delicate, beautiful neck of my beloved having the complexion of a champak flower and adorned with necklaces was perhaps eaten up.*

*Her arms, delicate like tender leaves, their tips (fingers) quivering, adorned with armlets and bracelets have surely been eaten away.*

*The young lady having many relations, forsaken by me, has been (perhaps) picked up by a demon for food and later abandoned half-eaten.*

*O long-armed Lakshmana, are you able to see my beloved anywhere? O noble lady, O darling, where have you gone? O Sita, Sita!*

*Rama ran from forest to forest, now jumping, now taking*

*strong strides, but all the time weeping, a madman busy in search of his beloved.*

*He rushed through forests, rivers, hills and mountain streams and through dense jungles with an unstable mind.*

*Rama went about the vast forest searching for the princess from Mithila all over not giving up hope of finding her. He continued to make great efforts for searching his beloved.<sup>22</sup>*

Thus ends the sixtieth sarga (canto) of Aranyakanda of the Ramayana. Such sorrowful lament continues in the next sarga in the poem.

Love is also a seeking for mutual possession. In a relation of the lover and beloved, this demand for mutual possession becomes absolute. However, the desire of possession still assumes a difference between the two – lover and beloved. The deeper seeking is that of a oneness, “of two souls merging into each other and becoming one”.<sup>23</sup> This is what will ultimately satisfy the lover.

We find great examples of this intense yearning in love poetry from various cultures. Kālidāsa, the great Sanskrit master-poet of sensuous beauty dealt with human emotions in a very delicate way. In Act III of *Vikramorvasie*, we find some beautiful description of the deep yearning of a lover. He is unable to sleep because of not being with his beloved. He is also unable to paint a picture of her beloved because he is worried that his tears may spoil her sweet face drawn on paper.

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“How can I, with this rankling wound of love,  
Call to me sleep who marries men with dreams?”

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<sup>22</sup> Translation by P. Geervani & K. Kamala, Valmiki Ramayana, 3.60.1-38

<sup>23</sup> Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 24: 569

And if I paint the sweetness of her face,  
Will not the tears, before it is half done,  
Blurring my gaze with mist, blot the dear vision?<sup>24</sup>

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Love is also a seeker for beauty and delight. This yearning is eternally satisfied in the vision and the touch and the joy of the beloved. A lover finds the highest possible ecstasy in every fiber of the being only when he or she is with his or her beloved.

We find a good example of love's yearning for beauty and delight in Kālidāsa's *Meghdūtam*. The story is of a husband banished for a year from his home and wife.

The husband sends "his imagination travelling on the wings of the northward-bound cloud over the sacred places, the great cities and rivers of India to the snowbound Himalaya and the homes of the Gods. There his mind sees his wife, breathes to her all its sorrow and longing and prays for an answering message. The love described may not be on the highest altitudes, but it is utterly real and human, full of enduring warmth, tenderness & passion, of strife and joy, tears and kisses, the daily food of love" (*Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 238*).

Sri Aurobindo reminds that this relation between a lover and the beloved demands the most. And even when it reaches the greatest intensities, it is still the least satisfied. This is because only in the Divine can love — any love — find its real and its utter satisfaction.

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<sup>24</sup> Translation by Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 5: 151

## Nature of Human Love

Human love, says the Mother, “is not a need of the soul, but rather a concession it makes for a time to the ego”<sup>25</sup>. This sounds startling to our ordinary intelligence, given that our ideas about love are almost entirely shaped by what our popular culture and popular romantic literature and films tell us about it.

We throw the word ‘soulmate’ so casually, without even realising that we don’t know what is this thing called soul. It is perhaps the false soul of desire in us which creates this illusion.

Ego, an instrument of nature, which gives us a sense of separate existence, also seeks its own separate love, exclusively for itself. This love is coloured by all the different forms in which ego expresses itself, which may be understood as egoism. However, since all love is indeed a universal force, there is not only a similarity but rather an identity between human love and Divine love. At the same time there is much deformity or degradation that love goes through as it manifests in the ordinary human instruments. But how does human love become so narrowly personal and so far removed from a wide, universal Divine love?

The Mother gives an immensely helpful explanation. Often, the need for human love is simply in obedience to a vital attraction for another, emerging as a natural instinct. But to the extent that it is not that, human love “is the need to have a Divine for oneself alone, at one’s entire and exclusive disposal, a Divine who is one’s personal property and to whom one gives oneself totally only if the gift is reciprocated.

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<sup>25</sup> CWM Vol. 14: 120

Instead of enlarging oneself to the size of the Divine and having a love as vast as the universe, one tries to reduce the Divine to one's own size and have His love for oneself alone"<sup>26</sup>.

## **Love, Sacrifice and Ego**

As a formation of *Prakriti*, ego gives an individual a sense of separate existence. But in reality, ego is not and can neither be independent nor separate. It cannot live to itself even if it were able to. Because in truth all beings are linked together by a secret Oneness. An individual's growth happens only when he or she moves away from the separate existence and interacts, relates, cooperates, and unites with other beings. This is where the play of ego comes in.

A relation of love between two human beings demands, rather necessitates a spirit of self-giving and sacrifice. But, most often, this sacrifice is done unconsciously. It is done egoistically and without knowledge or acceptance of the true meaning of the self-giving. Majority of people experience love in this way — limited and tortured by the smallness and suffering of the ego.

Yet all around we see the strong need human beings have for love. There is an irresistible push and seeking for it. Behind all these movements of human longing and seeking all these movements acts the force of Divine love. This divine force touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing. But this constant touch prepares these instruments till one day the capacity of true self-giving, the capacity of true love awakes in them.

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<sup>26</sup> CWM 14: 120

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“Not for the sake of the wife,” says Yajnavalkya in the Upanishad, “but for the sake of the Self is the wife dear to us.” This in the lower sense of the individual self is the hard fact behind the coloured and passionate professions of egoistic love; but in a higher sense it is the inner significance of that same love too which is not egoistic but divine.

“All true love and all sacrifice are in their essence Nature’s contradiction of the primary egoism and its separative error; it is her attempt to turn from a necessary first fragmentation towards a recovered oneness.... The law of sacrifice travels in Nature towards its culmination in this complete and unreserved self-giving; it awakens the consciousness of one common self in the giver and the object of the sacrifice. This culmination of sacrifice is the height even of human love and devotion when it tries to become divine; for there too the highest peak of love points into a heaven of complete mutual self-giving, its summit is the rapturous fusing of two souls into one.”<sup>27</sup>

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## **True Love**

True love, says the Mother, is something very deep and calm in its intensity. It is not a passion of the ordinary emotive heart, but a psychic quality. More importantly, true love finds its delight and satisfaction in itself. It does not need to manifest itself in any exterior ‘acts of love’, sensational or affectionate.

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<sup>27</sup> CWSA 23: 107-108

Most human love is far removed from this true love. Most human beings in ordinary relations speak of their right to be loved, but love's only right, if at all it has one, is the right of self-giving, says the Mother. Without self-giving there is no love. But an honest self-reflection and observation around us will tell us how rare is true self-giving in human love. In actuality most human love is full of selfishness and demands.

True love simply is! It doesn't impose itself or demands love in return. It is sufficient by itself. It is a source of immutable happiness. Very rarely does one experience this true love in ordinary life. But here again it is important to remember a note of caution that the Mother adds,

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“It is not the love that someone feels for you that can make you happy, it is the love you feel for others that makes you happy: for you receive the love that you give from the Divine, who loves eternally and unfailingly.”<sup>28</sup>

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In other words, it is the love that one simply feels for others, love that one gives to others which can be purified and refined to the status of becoming true, pure love. Because it is only the love that one gives which brings joy and calmness. Love that insists that it needs reciprocation can never be true love.

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<sup>28</sup> CWM 14: 122

## Human Nature Deforms Love

An important point to understand about love is that the distortions and deformations that we see in the apparent workings of the divine force of Love actually belong to its instruments through which it manifests. These limitations of the human instrument range from obscurity and ignorance to selfishness and egoism.

Our sages and seers help us see that all love is essentially a seeking for the union of the self with the Divine.

In its purity, love asks for nothing and is only about giving. The initial movement of love in human beings may carry some sense of purity and divinity. An idea of self-forgetfulness and self-giving may be prominent for some time. But over time the persistent and limited human nature that is full of desires and attachments distort that initial pure movement of love. This last point is a very common experience with people, almost a universal experience one can say. But the question to ask here is this — why does it happen like this?

The vital part in us, the life-force in us is the seat of all desires, passions, impulses, and instincts. When we primarily live in vital consciousness, especially the lower vital, or in other words, when we are primarily ruled by the movements of this vital part in us, we find ourselves getting more attached to our desires and passions, our emotions and feelings.

We are more clinging and lot less generous in our feelings. Our ego is primarily identified with the vital. And it is this vital ego that dictates our responses, behaviour patterns and attitudes towards love. Even our love and liking are egoistic if they are mostly driven by the lower vital which is concerned with small egoistic movements such as lust, greed, jealousy, envy, vanity, pride etc.

Love is a thing of the heart, it is often said. In ordinary parlance, what people generally refer to as the heart is simply an emotive heart. It is full of emotions more or less similar to the animal's, but more variously developed, says Sri Aurobindo. It is important to understand the nature of these emotions. We can then understand how the movement of love whose origin lies in the Supreme Force of Divine Love gets degraded so much at the level of human love.

Sri Aurobindo helps us when he describes further the heart of vital emotion.

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“Its emotions are governed by egoistic passion, blind instinctive affections and all the play of the life-impulses with their imperfections, perversions, often sordid degradations, — a heart besieged and given over to the lusts, desires, wraths, intense or fierce demands or little greeds and mean pettinesses of an obscure and fallen life force and debased by its slavery to any and every impulse. This mixture of the emotive heart and the sensational hungering vital creates in man a false soul of desire. . .”<sup>29</sup>

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This false soul of desire colours the movement of love with its petty instinct of clinging to its object of desire, which it sees as its object of love. And when there is desire, there is bound to be expectation; in this instance, expectation of being loved in return. This is often the beginning of much degradation in love.

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<sup>29</sup> CWSA 23: 150

## Love Grows and Purifies Itself

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“Love of man, love of woman, love of things, love of thy neighbour, love of thy country, love of animals, love of humanity are all the love of God reflected in these living images. So love and grow mighty to enjoy all, to help all and to love for ever.”<sup>30</sup>

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All love is only one Love, pure and true in its essential nature. It is the imperfection of the human nature that degrades and deforms it by bringing in all sorts of petty vital instincts of possession, jealousy, attachment, lust etc. But as we walk on the path of purifying our vital nature, the love in us also gets purified and grows more and more to its true nature.

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“At first one loves only when one is loved.

“Next, one loves spontaneously, but one wants to be loved in return.

“Then one loves even if one is not loved, but one still wants one’s love to be accepted.

“And finally, one loves purely and simply, without any other need or joy than that of loving.”<sup>31</sup>

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There is a progressive nature to our inner growth. But it requires sincere effort and an intense aspiration for self-purification.

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<sup>30</sup> CWSA 12: 491

<sup>31</sup> CWM 14: 122

It can be said that all human love, even in all its deformations is a practice ground for us. Human love also widens and expands as we expand our circle of care and affection — from one single object of love to love for more people, from love for our immediate family to love for the wider community, from love for our community to love for the nation, and from there to love for the humanity and all creatures, love for nature and mother earth.

By such widening we slowly begin to break away from the confines of our limited ego, our separate existence. Even when it is not really a feeling of love for all, the widening of one's self through sympathy, goodwill, universal benevolence and beneficence, helps one to mentally and emotionally escape from the first limits of one's ego. This becomes a good preparation for the human instrument in its capacity to love. This is what is meant by gradually becoming more open and receptive to the universal force of love.

Because of the present imperfections of human nature, there are bound to be innumerable sorrows, troubles, regrets, difficulties along the path of love. There is bound to be much pain and agony, much heartache and despair. But if instead of allowing these to cause disappointment in us if we somehow learn to see these as 'learnings' on the path of love, we continue to make progress with our work of self-purification and inner growth. All human love is thus a preparation to experience the divine love.

## **Human Love and Relations**

Love between human beings expresses itself through various relations – parent-child, siblings, married couple, lover and beloved, friendship, extended family, etc. Then there is also the relation between humans

and animals. What is the nature of love across some of these relations, and how it may be raised to a higher movement? It is important to explore this question and its related aspects.

### **Love of parents for children**

So many stories and books have been written, movies have been made about the love of parents for their children, especially the love of a mother. Maternal love is often considered the most unconditional love. But is it really so?

Is any human love unconditional in the truest sense? What about the role of the mother as a disciplinarian for the child? As an adult responsible for teaching the child the right values and give a positive start in life, doesn't a parent also expect the child to behave in a certain way? How does such expectation or desire change the nature of the parental love? And what about the case where there is more than one child? Does a mother love all her children equally?

Most of the instinctive answers to such questions, in our ordinary experience, are shaped by the stories of motherhood we have heard in our lives, the books we have read, the films we have watched. Each culture has created its own myths and stories, its own ideals of motherhood.

In India, we have those countless stories of Yashoda's love for Krishna and Kaushalya's love for Rama. Stories of father's love for their children are also not wanting. We have Dashratha who even gives up his life when separated from his first-born son, Rama.

The Mahabharata presents to us many different examples of parental love, some of which actually compel us to dig deeper into the nature of parental love. For instance, on one side we have Dhritrashtra who is so attached to his sons that he is even unable to stop them from

doing all kinds of wrong and adharmic actions. On the other side, we also have Kunti who finally admits to Karna that he is in fact her first-born son whom she had given away because she was unmarried at the time. But she chooses to tell him about this truth only when she finds out that Karna would be fighting against her other five sons and has also taken a vow to kill Arjuna.

There are many such stories that throw light on different aspects of parental love and in particular the love of a mother. These stories help us to move beyond the unthinking idea that a mother's love is unconditional in all cases.

The Mother was once asked the question — “what kind of love do parents have for their children?” Let us read her detailed response and reflect carefully on it.

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“What kind? A human love, don't they? Like all human loves: frightfully mixed, with all sorts of things. The need of possession, a formidable egoism. At first, I must tell you that a wonderful picture has been painted... many books written, wonderful things said about a mother's love for her children. I assure you that except for the capacity of speaking about the subject in flowery phrases, the love of the higher animals like the... well, the mammals for their children is exactly of the same nature: the same devotion, the same self-forgetfulness, the same self-denial, the same care for education, the same patience, the same...

“I have seen absolutely marvellous things, and if they had been written down and applied to a woman instead of to a cat, superb novels would have been made, people would have said: “What a person! How marvellously devoted are

these women in their maternal love!” Exactly the same thing. Only, cats could not use flowery language. That’s all. They could not write books and make speeches, that is the only difference.

“But I have seen absolutely astonishing things. And that kind of self-giving and self-oblivion—as soon as there is the beginning of love, it comes. But men... I sincerely believe, from all that I have studied, that there is perhaps a greater purity in animals for they do not think, while human beings with their mental power, their capacity of reflecting, reasoning, analysing, studying, all that, oh! They spoil the most lovely movement. They begin to calculate, reason, doubt, organise.

“Take, for instance, parents. At the risk of removing many illusions in your consciousness, I must tell you something about the source of a mother’s love for her child. It is because this child is made of her very own substance, and for quite a long time, relatively long, the material link, the link of substance, between mother and child is extremely close—it is as though a bit of her flesh had been taken out and put apart at a distance—and it is only much later that the tie between the two is completely cut.

“There is a kind of tie, of subtle sensation, such that the mother feels exactly what the child feels, as she would feel it in herself. That then is the material basis of the mother’s attachment for the child. It is a basis of material identity, nothing else but that. Feeling comes much later (it may come earlier, that depends on people), but I am speaking of the majority: feeling comes only long afterwards, and it is

conditioned. There are all kinds of things.... I could speak to you for hours on the subject. But still this must not be mixed up with love.

“It is a material identification which makes the mother feel intimately, feel quite concretely and tangibly what the child is feeling: if the child receives a shock, well, the mother feels it. This lasts at least for two months. This is the basis. The rest comes from people’s nature, their state of development, their consciousness, education and capacity for feeling. This is added to the first.

“And then there are all the collective suggestions that make up all sorts of stories—for people are wonderful at constructing stories. They write novels about everything. They have used their minds to build up their imaginations which go round in the atmosphere and then are caught just like that. So some catch a certain type of these, others another kind, and then, as imagination is a force of propulsion, with it one begins to act, and then finally one makes a novel of one’s life, if he is in the least imaginative...

“This has absolutely nothing to do with the true consciousness, with the psychic being, nothing at all, but people come and talk to you in flowery language and tell you stories—all these are wandering imaginations. If one could see, that is, if you could see this mental atmosphere, that of the physical mind, which is circulating everywhere, making you move, making you feel, making you think, making you act, oh, good heavens! You would lose many

of your illusions about your personality. But indeed it is like that. Whether one knows it or not, it is like that.”<sup>32</sup>

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Now doesn't this radically alter our view of paternal and maternal love for the child?

### **Duties towards family**

Having briefly explored the nature of parental love let us now look at the children's duty towards their parents. The notion of family duties is an important one for people in the *grihastha* stage of their life. Dharmashastra-s and also our *itihāsa-s* have spoken much about this.

Service to parents is part of family and social duty. But here again, one's attitude towards such duty is important to consider. The psychic element of love and the quality of self-giving will not be there if one does it only as a social obligation, or even for the sake of attachment to the parents.

The important thing to remember is that even when living in the family and fulfilling one's social duties, one can prepare oneself for higher goal in life of spiritual release.

This can be done by consciously remembering the Divine in all and by doing all one's duties as a sacrifice for the sake of the Divine. This will not only help the person evolve inwardly, but also free oneself from the chains of attachment which only bring misery and suffering. This is how love for parents can purify itself and grow more towards its true psychic quality.

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<sup>32</sup> CWM, 6: 106-108

Even the earning of money and looking after family affairs can be and be done in a spirit of entire detachment if one truly wants to evolve in one's consciousness through family life.

### **Love between friends**

In ordinary life, friendships are generally founded upon shared interests, similar views towards life and its goals, regular association such as being school or college mates or work colleagues, etc. In some rare cases, there is a natural genuine mutual affection, even when there may not be much commonality on the surface.

We find one of the most wonderful examples of such true friendship in the story of Krishna and Sudama. In the Mahabharata we also find the story of friendship between Duryodhana and Karna which can be a good subject of study for the dilemma between one's duty towards a friend and one's duty towards dharma, the right and the true.

The play of human egoism is active in relation between friends just like in all human relationships. This is what also gives them a fleeting character, as we commonly hear people speak of friends who change with time.

It is important that more and more people begin to see friendship, brotherhood, love to be sacred things, rooted in the soul, and not as things "broken at every moment by the movements of the ego, soiled and spoiled and destroyed by the passions, jealousies, treacheries to which the vital is prone"<sup>33</sup>. For that to happen, much purification of the vital is necessary. All clinging, all insistence for possession, petty emotions, sentimentalism, feeling of hurt, pride, envy, etc. have to fall

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<sup>33</sup> CWSA 31: 295

away if one wants to experience true affection. Love and affection have to be rebased on a deeper and higher consciousness.

## **From Love Human to Love Divine**

We all crave for affection and love. It is one of the basic human needs. We try to satisfy this need through all our loves – love for the family, love for the beloved, love for friends, etc. And somehow or the other, at some point in time we go through much pain and struggle on account of love. We have seen why that is so. Thus, despite all our loves, something in us remains dissatisfied, our thirst for love remains unquenched.

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“The thirst for affection and love is a human need, but it can be quenched only if it turns towards the Divine. As long as it seeks satisfaction in human beings, it will always be disappointed or wounded.”<sup>34</sup>

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Sri Aurobindo gives a solution to overcome such disappointment and disillusionment. In many cases this is often the start of seeking for something deeper, something more lasting in nature, something eternal. Out of a disenchantment with imperfect and impermanent human love comes a new beginning for some, beginning of a seeking for love divine, love that is true.

The way to an ideal of spiritually rooted love is different for different people. For some the way is to leave everything else to follow the

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<sup>34</sup> CWM 14: 121

Divine alone, the way of the ascetic. However, this doesn't really mean an aversion for anybody any more than it means aversion for the world and life, says Sri Aurobindo.

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“It only means absorption in one's central aim, with the idea that once that is attained it will be easy to found all relations on the true basis, to become truly united with others in the heart and the spirit and the life, united in the spiritual truth and in the Divine.”<sup>35</sup>

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But there is also another way, the path of purification and transformation of the vital.

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“The other way is to go forward from where one is, seeking the Divine centrally and subordinating all else to that, but not putting everything else aside, rather seeking to transform gradually and progressively whatever is capable of such transformation. All the things that are not wanted in the relation, – impurity, jealousy, anger, egoistic demand, – drop away as the inner being grows purer and is replaced by the unity of soul with soul and the binding together of the social life in the hoop of the Divine.”<sup>36</sup>

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This path essentially means progressively establishing one's poise at a deeper psychic level instead of vital ego. It requires that jealousy, strife, hatred, aversion, rancour and all other evil vital feelings must

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<sup>35</sup> CWSA 31: 289

<sup>36</sup> CWSA 31: 289

be altogether abandoned. All egoistic love and attachment will have to disappear also. This is the path towards an integral perfection. This is the path that leads the individual and the collective to a greater Harmony — within and without, and to a deeper Love, love that heals, love that quenches the deepest thirst.



**The manifestation of the  
love of the Divine in the  
world was the great  
holocaust, the supreme  
self-giving.**

**- The Mother (CWM, 3: 71)**

# The Future of the Family (Book Excerpt)

*Kishor Gandhi*

**Editor's note:** We present some relevant excerpts from Kishor Gandhi's significant book titled, *Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the New Age*.<sup>37</sup> The following extracts are taken from the 1991 edition published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

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In July 1960, the author [Kishor Gandhi] had submitted a brief synopsis of his lectures on the subject of the Family to the Mother for approval before taking up for teaching it in the Sociology class of the Higher Course of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

In the synopsis he had mentioned that in the view of some of the contemporary social thinkers the modern Western family had now become so insecure that it was likely to break down in the near future. The Mother while going over the synopsis asked for information as to what he was going to say on this point.

The author prepared for the Mother's information a brief note on the recent developments in the modern family which were considered likely to bring about its breakdown, and also put some questions to her apropos of her above remark.

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<sup>37</sup> 1991, pp. 367-372

The Mother read the note and answered the questions. This note is given below followed by the author's questions and the Mother's answers. The Mother's answers are presented in bold font.

### **Brief note on the modern family**

Certain developments in modern times in the family system, especially in the Western European countries, have made it so very insecure that it has led some contemporary social thinkers to conclude that this system will in the near future disintegrate and disappear. These developments are briefly stated here.

The family system which prevailed in Western Europe until about the nineteenth century was the "extended" patriarchal system of the feudal times. It was entirely of an authoritarian type in which the male family head wielded almost complete authority in all matters. And the woman was altogether subordinated to him. She had hardly any political, legal or property rights of her own and was mostly treated as a "minor" or a "ward". This authority of man over woman was supported by the Church and the State and the cultural traditions of the Western society.

This patriarchal family was also an economic unit, owned and managed by the male family head. Besides the economic functions it also performed a large number of other functions — political, religious, educational, cultural, etc. It was thus a multi-functional group.

This system was subjected to very powerful influences in the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution not only radically revolutionized the economic structure of the Western society but also transformed in a brief period the entire social order. These influences,

combined with the new democratic trends of the modern age, swiftly undermined the authoritarian traditions in the State and the Church and also in the family system.

As a result, the domination of the male family head over his wife and children was considerably decreased. At present in a number of European countries women have almost equal social, political, legal and property rights as men. The same equalitarian trend is powerfully operating in all the other European and Asiatic nations where the women's status still remains inferior to man's.

Also a large number of economic and other functions which the Western family used to perform before the modern period have now been taken over by other social agencies which perform them with greater efficiency and more economy. The factory, the school, the hospital, etc. have taken over the productive, educational and nursing functions formerly carried out within the family. And even the household functions like laundering, preserving and baking, and in some measure even cooking and cleaning, are now more and more passing out into the hands of specialised agencies outside the family.

One important result of the transfer of these functions has been the reduction of the size of the earlier "extended" family. The economic activities of the family no longer require the assistance of relatives and married children, hence there is no need for their staying in the household.

This contraction in the family size is further increased by the widespread use of contraceptive devices. The use of these devices for prevention and reduction of children has considerably reduced the burden of parental functions in the modern family. And even this reduced burden is further lightened by the growth of various social

agencies like the maternity hospital, the baby clinic, the crèche, the kindergarten and the “baby-sitter.”

The only functions that still remain with the small modern urban family are the satisfaction of the sex-impulse, the need for companionship, the desire for children and the provision of home comforts. It is on these functions that the continued existence of family depends. But it is becoming evident that even these functions are not satisfactorily fulfilled by the present family system.

Several recent investigations have proved that there is widespread discord and unhappiness in the family, as attested by the increasing number of divorces, separations and desertions. Formerly the family was held together by several bonds. Now only a few bonds remain. And they too are subjected to such extreme strains that they might snap.

These developments have led some social thinkers to conclude that the modern family has hardly any important functions left to perform. And, therefore, it will wither away in the future. They are afraid that it will break down and disappear as there is no justification left for its existence. All of them do not consider such a breakdown to be an undesirable thing. There are others, however, who believe that the functions that still remain with the family are sufficiently important and durable to prevent the family system from completely disintegrating in the future. And that it will survive in some modified form.

## The Mother's Answers to Questions on the Future of the Family<sup>38</sup>

In reference to the view of some modern social thinkers expressing fear of the possible breakdown and disappearance of the family system, you have remarked that this breakdown “was, and is still, an indispensable movement to bring humanity to a higher and broader realisation.”

This raises some important questions which I state below for your clarification:

- Do you consider this dissolution of the family system indispensable only for the few exceptional individuals who follow some high mental or spiritual ideal or also for the general humanity?

**“Yes, only for the few exceptional individuals who follow some high mental or spiritual ideal.”**

- If you advocate a complete dissolution of the family system for the entire humanity, do you consider it advisable to happen even before the new process of birth by direct materialisation has been normalised on earth?

“More liberty and plasticity in the system are advisable — Fixed rules are harmful to evolution.”

- Do you also consider the abolition of the marriage system as equally indispensable as the abolition of the family system for the higher development of humanity? So long as the new

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<sup>38</sup> CWM 14: 292-293

process of birth has not been normalised, would not the present manner of sexual precreation continue? In that case, would not some form of marriage relationship be necessary?

**“Marriage will always take place, but legal ceremonies must not be enforced, to avoid *illegality*.”**

- So long as the new process of birth has not been normalised and the children continue to be born through the present sexual process, is not the family life and its atmosphere best suited to their upbringing, especially in their early formative years? The other alternative is to provide for their care and upbringing through some other agency, like the state nurseries, as was advocated by some communist thinkers. But this view has not found many supporters, for it has been realised that the tender and affectionate care which the young children need could best be provided only in the intimate atmosphere of the family home by the parents. If this is true, then for the sake of the young children at least, would not the family be necessary until the new method of birth becomes possible and normal in the future?

**“Here also both things must be equally admitted and practised. There are many cases in which it would be a blessing for the baby to be separated from his parents.**

**“A minimum of *rules*.**

**“A maximum of *freedom*.**

**“All possibilities must have equal scope for manifestation, then humanity will progress more rapidly.”**



. . . human love is not  
a need of the soul,  
but rather a concession it makes  
for a time to the ego.

- The Mother (CWM, 14: 120)



# Such Indeed Is Maya – A Tale Retold

*Sri Ramakrishna*

**Editor’s note:** A popular Pauranic story was retold by Sri Ramakrishna<sup>39</sup> to illustrate the hold that our attachments have on the ordinary understanding and experience of human relationships. It is ignorance which leads to false attachments that is commonly spoken of as *moh-maya* (delusion-illusion). As one sincerely progresses towards deeper self-awareness and self-knowledge, the veil of ignorance slowly begins to lift up.

The word *Maya* comes from the Sanskrit root *mā*, which means to measure, to delimit. In its original Vedic sense, it meant the power of the infinite consciousness of the Absolute to form *nāma-rūpa*, the Name and Form, out of the illimitable indivisible Truth of Infinite Existence. But over time this word came to acquire a pejorative sense and *Maya* was regarded as an illusive Power.

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## Such Indeed is Maya!

Once Narada besought the Lord of the universe, “Lord, show me that Maya of Thine which can make the impossible possible.” The Lord nodded assent.

Subsequently the Lord one day set out on a travel with Narada. After going some distance, He felt very thirsty and fatigued. So He sat down

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<sup>39</sup> *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna*, second edition, pp. 81-83, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai

and told Narada, “Narada, I feel much thirsty; please get me a little water from somewhere.” Narada at once ran in search of water.

Finding no water nearby, he went far from the place and saw a river at a great distance. When he approached the river, he saw a most charming young lady sitting there, and was at once captivated by her beauty. As soon as Narada went near her, she began to address him in sweet words, and before long, both fell in love with each other.

Narada then married her, and settled down as a householder.

In course of time he had a number of children by her. And while he was thus living happily with his wife and children, there came a pestilence in the country. Death began to collect its toll from every place. Then Narada proposed to abandon the place and go somewhere else. His wife acceded to it, and they both came out of their house leading their children by the hand.

But no sooner did they come to the bridge to cross the river than there came a terrible flood, and in the rush of water, all their children were swept away one after another, and at last the wife too was drowned.

Overwhelmed with grief at his bereavement, Narada sat down on the bank and began to weep piteously. Just then the Lord appeared before him, saying, “O Narada, where is the water? And why are you weeping?”

The sight of the Lord startled the sage, and then he understood everything. He exclaimed, “Lord, my obeisance to Thee, and my obeisance also to Thy wonderful Maya!”



There is ALWAYS  
a bitter taste behind the  
human love—  
**it is only the Divine Love  
which never disappoints.**

- The Mother (CWM, 14: 119)



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# Make Not a Bond of Love

*Narendra Murty*

**Editor's note:** The author reminds of the true place family and human relationships have in the larger scheme of human life and its spiritual destiny and aim. He speaks of the attitudes of detachment (*vairagya*) and evenness of mind (*samatvam*) that we must cultivate towards our human relationships while pursuing the path of Yoga. And to illustrate this he includes a powerful Zen story and a brief commentary on it. This story and commentary are included in his book titled, *An Oak Tree in the Garden: Exploring the World of Zen*.

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का ते कान्ता कस्ते पुत्रः  
संसारोऽयमतीव विचित्रः ।  
कस्य त्वं कः कुत आयातः  
तत्त्वं चिन्तय तदिह भ्रातः ॥

*Kaa te kaantaa kaste putrah*  
*Samsaaroyam ateeva vichitrah*  
*Kasya tvam kah kuta aayaatah*  
*Tattvam chintaya tadiha bhraatah*

*Translation:* Who is your wife? Who is your son? Supremely strange indeed is this samsara. Of whom are you? Where have you come from? Think of that Truth here, O brother! (Adi Shankara's *Moha Mudgara*, Verse 8)

Aristotle declared that man is a social animal. Man can hardly survive in isolation. And when he does survive in isolation, that itself becomes a story like that of Robinson Crusoe. So as per this wisdom, the rightful and true place of a man is amid society, among his fellow human beings.

The institution of home, family relations, no doubt, have a beneficial influence for the growth of the individual. Yet sometimes they can become a source of bondage and a great cause for stress. Man and woman must live, no doubt, in a spirit of togetherness but Kahlil Gibran sounds a note of caution in *The Prophet*:

Let there be spaces in your togetherness  
And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.  
Love one another, but make not a bond of love. . .

And stand together yet not too near together:  
For the pillars of the temple stand apart...

There should not be a clinging attachment or a desire to possess and dominate. Without some level of detachment, human relations become toxic and suffocating.

Family is a field of trial and test; a station in life which is helpful for our growth. But family is not the final destination of life. We should have the intellectual maturity to understand that we are not in this world just to maintain a family! But we find that for many people, the maintaining of their family becomes the sole purpose of their lives.

Shankara, the great *acharya* asks us to enquire: *Who is your wife? Who is your son?* In life, man and woman are born independently and must die and depart alone. What is the purpose of life? Is it the

maintenance of the wife or the husband? Bringing up children is also one of the responsibilities that we perform. But are we in this world for that purpose? We say, *my wife! my son!* But do we know *who* the person is, who is saying “*My wife,*” “*My son?*”

Shankara is asking – To Whom do you belong? From where have you come? To whom do I belong? Why am I in this world? Where are we going? Do we know the answers to these questions? We don’t know our own identity; we do not know why we are performing this journey of life and yet we are foolishly saying *My wife, my son* – all the time! *How strange is samsara,* says Shankara.

Yes, family is important for our physical and vital well-being but we should remember that we are not in this world just to maintain a family. God has sent us here with a spiritual and divine destiny. We should try to find out what that destiny is.

Yes, we should fulfil all our family responsibilities but we should not make the mistake of believing that *that* itself is the purpose of life. We should ask ourselves *why are we here in this world? What is the purpose of life?* Shankara addresses us as a brother and says *think about this Truth my brother.*

Here’s what Sri Aurobindo has to say about human relations:

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“These [human] relations can never give a full or permanent satisfaction; if they did, there would be no reason why the human being would ever seek the Divine. He would remain satisfied in the ordinary earth life. It is only when the Divine is found and the consciousness lifted

up into the true consciousness that the true relations with others can come.”<sup>40</sup>

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So, detachment (*vairagya*) and evenness of mind (*samatvam*) are the right attitudes to have towards human relations.

But how can we cultivate *vairagya* and *samatvam* when we are so attached to our human relations? The answer is — by the practice of Yoga. To become detached from something, we must attach ourselves to something else. And Yoga is about becoming attached to the Divine. Yoga is derived from the word *yuj*, that is, to unite. Unite with what? With the divine. To be in Yoga means to be in a union with the Divine.

A sincere aspirant on the path of Yoga advances further if one has a shining example in front of one’s eyes as to how an accomplished Yogi deals with human relations while living detachedly in the world. This has been beautifully demonstrated in the Zen story titled *Is That So?*

### **Zen Story: Is That So?**

The Zen master Hakuin was praised by his neighbours as one living a pure life. A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store lived near him. Suddenly, without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child. This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin as the child’s father.

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<sup>40</sup> CWSA 31: 283

In great anger the parents went to the master. “Is that so?” was all he would say.

After the child was born, it was brought to Hakuin. By this time, he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbours and everything else the little one needed.

A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth – that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fish market.

The mother and the father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again.

Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: “Is that so?”

### **Commentary on the Story**

We are all creatures driven by emotions. What is the main driving force of our lives? Rationality? Wisdom? If we are honest with ourselves, we would have to admit it’s the emotions; the physical and vital cravings that mainly drive us.

A young girl got pregnant. That was the result of desire and lust. But she was afraid of her parents. So instead of naming the actual father which would have made her guilty in the eyes of her parents — to escape their wrath, she took the name of Hakuin.

Immediately, the anger of the parents gets deflected and the entire anger now fell on Hakuin. When an elderly, respected man is accused of impregnating a young girl, it is natural to blame that man. The young girl immediately gets sympathy. *Poor girl, she is innocent. What can she do if an elderly, lecherous man traps her? She is not at*

*fault. She is too young to know. That man is the villain. He is a dirty old man.*

In great anger the parents went to the master. How dare you? How could you do this to our young innocent child? And all the rest that can be imagined.

“*Is that so?*” was all the Master would say. Supreme detachment. Not a word of protest, not an iota of anger at this gross injustice. But a silent acceptance of *what is*.

Didn't Hakuin know that someone else was responsible for this misdeed? Then why didn't he protest? Because he was a man who acts out of compassion and wisdom. He understood that the young girl must have been in some great difficulty to name him. Perhaps naming him was the only option she had to save herself from the anger of her parents.

This is the true test of Zen. And of Yoga. A Master may be enlightened, but the test of that is how he conducts himself in the world. Nirvana is not an end in itself. The Bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism is about postponing our own Nirvana and liberation as long as there are suffering human beings all around.

Alan Watts reminds us of a Zen teaching that nobody can find Buddha in a Paradise until he had found it in himself and in other sentient beings. And nobody could expect to find enlightenment in a hermitage unless he was capable of finding it in the life of the world.

When a monk who had taken up the Bodhisattva vow was asked where he would like to go after attaining Nirvana, he replied, “*To hell! For that is where I would be required.*” That is the Bodhisattva ideal. That is compassion. A lived spirituality and holiness. Not sitting in the

clouds and merely pitying the lesser mortals who are struggling with their sins and weaknesses.

In Sri Aurobindo's mystical-spiritual epic, *Savitri*, after winning her victory over Death, Savitri even rejects the joys of everlasting heaven with the words:

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I climb not to Thy everlasting Day  
[. . .]  
Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;  
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield  
The forge where the Archmason shapes his works.  
Thy servitudes on earth are greater, King,  
Than all the glorious liberties of heaven.  
[. . .]  
In me the spirit of immortal love  
Stretches its arms out to embrace mankind.  
Too far thy heavens for me from suffering men.  
Imperfect is the joy not shared by all.<sup>41</sup>

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In a magnificent statement rejecting Heaven (Everlasting Day) for Earth, Savitri is saying that her rightful place of work is on Earth where human souls are struggling in the spirit's battlefield. For her, the servitudes of earth are greater than the glorious liberties of heaven; her immortal Love wants to embrace and encircle the hearts of all. This too is compassion for the struggling souls, where one's own liberation is secondary.

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<sup>41</sup> *Savitri, Book XI, Canto 1, CWSA 34: 685-686*

When an enlightened Master acts out of compassion for the struggling creatures, things like his personal reputation, praise, infamy, blame — all these appear nowhere in his mental space. Because he is way above them. He doesn't act out of emotions like we do.

Savitri too, is not being emotional in her heroic stand. As an embodiment of the Divine Shakti, she is acting out of a divine compassion for the struggling souls on earth.

Let us go back to Hakuin in our story. Even after losing his reputation – which did not trouble him at all — he was taking very good care of the child, procuring milk and all other requirements of the child. He was just doing what is to be done with supreme detachment, serenity and compassion. He was acting with a perfect equipoise of the mind in the spirit of the Bhagavad Gita:

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।  
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥<sup>42</sup>

*Sri Aurobindo's Translation:* Make grief and happiness, loss and gain, victory and defeat equal to thy soul and then turn to battle; so thou shalt not incur sin.

That is the way of the Yogi, the mental equanimity of a Yogi. Hakuin is a Yogi, a complete Master of himself. Earlier he had received praise, he was indifferent. Then he lost his reputation. Both praise and blame, reputation and infamy — they were all the same for him. For he was above them. What do these fickle emotions that trouble human beings like us, matter to a Master, a Yogi? He is not troubled by the froth and bubbles that emanate from human relations.

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<sup>42</sup> Chapter II, verse 38

As the story unfolds after a year the young mother can't stand her own falsehood and tells her parents the truth about the child's father. It was a young man who worked in the fish market and not Haikun.

A holy man has been silently suffering infamy because of her. How could she do such an abominable thing? Her conscience was awakened and she owned up to her misdemeanor. Now she was driven by guilt. Poor girl, how was she supposed to know that Hakuin was way above all emotions that are a normal part of human relations?

Upon learning the truth, the girl's parents quickly go to Hakuin to ask for his forgiveness, and to get the child back. Hakuin was just as willing to give up the child as he was when accepting it as his own. While giving back the child, all he says again is: "Is that so?"

Not a word of condemnation. Again, a total acceptance of *what is*. There was not a triumphal display of righteousness. No proclamations of innocence. Not even a word hinting that, "*I am happy that you people have come to know the truth. I was blamed unjustly as you can now see.*" No, none of that. Just a divine serenity. Once again, only these words: "*Is that so?*"



. . . human affection whatever its  
value has its place, because through  
it the psychic being gets the  
emotional experiences it needs until  
it is ready to prefer  
the true to the apparent,  
the perfect to the imperfect,  
the divine to the human.

*Sri Aurobindo*  
*CWSA, 31: 296-297*

# Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Dramatic Poems

*Ravindra Khanna*

**Editor's note:** Read here a review of M.V. Seetharaman's book titled, *Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Dramatic Poems*. Published by Annamalai University in 1964, this book carries a foreword by Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, then Vice Chancellor of Annamalai University. This review by Ravindra Khanna was first published in April 1966 issue of Sri Aurobindo Ashram journal *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture*, Vol. XVIII, no. 3 (pp. 49-52).

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The world is familiar with Sri Aurobindo's name as the master of Integral Yoga, the exponent of the spiritual significances embedded in the esoteric verses of the Veda, Upanishad and Gita, or the writer of a luminous spiritual poetry of his own. But it is somewhat of an enigma that he should be the author of plays which have no easily discoverable spiritual message and aim at rendering life with all its clashes and jostlings, burning passions, voluptuous luxuries and huge ambitions such as reach out beyond the earth.

No doubt, we must not forget that his is not a world-shunning etiolated spirituality but one which sees life too as "a power of the Divine and not a creation of some malignant Chance or dark Titanic impulse"<sup>43</sup>. And yet it is not life as it is that he accepts in his yoga. As he remarks,

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<sup>43</sup> CWSA 23: 172

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Life is indispensable to the completeness of the creative spiritual realisation, but life released, transformed, uplifted. . .<sup>44</sup>

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What then is the justification for these plays with the stage set in places like Syria, Baghdad and Bassora, ancient India, and the snow-bound regions of Norway? Well, here is what Sri Aurobindo says:

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Your life on this earth is a divine poem that you are translating into earthly language or a strain of music which you are rendering into words.<sup>45</sup>

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What could be a better rendering of this divine poem than poetic drama which takes life in all its richness, power and complexity? And it not only invests it with the Light that never was on sea or land, but also reveals the hidden direction behind its wayward and straggling flow, discovers for us the laws of the inner growth of the psyche towards wisdom, love, beauty and strength.

M.V. Seetharaman brings to his work his deep knowledge of Sri Aurobindo's all-comprehending spiritual gospel and of his views on the nature of poetry in general and poetic drama in particular. The conditions of success of a poetic drama are exacting to an extreme degree. That's why Sri Aurobindo could say of the creators of dramatic poetry:

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<sup>44</sup> CWSA 23: 173

<sup>45</sup> CWSA 12: 100

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. . . the entire literature of the world has hardly given us more than a dozen. The difficult evolution of dramatic poetry is always more hard to lead than the lyric which is poetry's native expression, or than the narrative which is its simpler expansion.<sup>46</sup>

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Seetharaman unfolds the inner significance of each of the five plays — *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta* and *Eric*. He gives us 'the interpretative vision' that ensouls each play and imperceptibly emerges from it.

*Rodogune* is a highly sustained tragedy without any comic or tragic relief lightening the sombre gloom cast by 'some cold ironic god.' And yet, as the author remarks, "it is a poetic play and is typically Aurobindonian in its vision of life, characterization and atmosphere. It is a tragedy of fate working through the passions of human beings and therefore presents the 'mysterium tremendum' of life in this world. But the sufferings of men and women in the play are shown to be purposive and serve evolution of the souls of these human beings. Behind the passions we see the divine element or, as Eunice puts it, ". . . the divinity that sits in man . . . the power Unnameable that struggles with its world."<sup>47</sup>

Thus Antiochus, the tragic hero full of hubris, comes to the realization that the gods break only "a body, not this soul; for that belongs, I feel, to other masters."<sup>48</sup> And *Rodogune*, the heroine, always strives to make life sweet:

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<sup>46</sup> CWSA 26: 75

<sup>47</sup> CWSA 3: 189

<sup>48</sup> CWSA 3: 289

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By outward harmony with circumstance  
And a calm soul within that is above  
My Fortunes.<sup>49</sup>

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The author has perused each play not only with a view to extracting its hidden meaning but with an alert imaginative vision responding sensitively to the stage effect. Thus he closes his appreciation of *Rodogune* with these words:

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“The sensitive spectator of the play sees all, undergoes all by imaginative identification with the life (individual and collective) in the drama. He experiences with Cleopatra, Phayllus and their similars the variations on the same theme of Egoism. But he breathes simultaneously in the ‘ampler ether’, the ‘diviner air’ of the spiritual, psychic and subliminal with Eremite, *Rodogune* and Antiochus.

“And the result is a strange alchemy purification of his consciousness, citta suddhi. He feels ‘the touch of tears in mortal things’ but feels also the Divine Master shaping the human flute and making it perfect to breathe through it melodies eternally new’. To him is the Peace Eternal, Shanti Shaswati.”

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The author’s treatment of *The Viziers of Bassora*, a romantic comedy redolent of the enchanting stories of the Arabian Nights and the Caliph Haroun-al-Rashid ‘whose name has acquired a magical halo

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<sup>49</sup> CWSA 3: 208

and mythical significance around it,' combines very deftly perspicacity with imaginative sympathy and insight into each one of the characters. Some of these characters are villainous, self-centred and full of dark machinations against those 'made in God's image and growing more in that image of Love, Light and Grace'.

As a specimen we shall quote his summing up of the character of Ibn Sawy, the good Vizier: "Just he is, but powerful he is not. A faithful and sincere instrument he could be, but not an originative force."

Love being the presiding deity of the play, the women characters are most deserving of study. As the author observes:

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"To inspire love by their beauty of form and character in those who are capable of it is the great privilege of the women in the play who are all of them made in God's image and grow increasingly in that image.

"The love they bestow on men and on each other draws out the best in all and acts for harmony, sweetness and right... their robust optimism and essential cheerfulness of outlook on life living in the present with full trust in the power of the life-force to disentangle the complications it has got into are contagious and help ease the gloom and murky darkness of life. They could laugh at the incongruities of life and make the men laugh with them and become sane and wise."

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"Love", as the author observes, "invokes a greater power than evil to intervene in a world of darkness and evil and that power responds and even rushes with all its puissance and restores the rotten society and gives it a new birth in love and maturity."

On the songs sung by Anice, the heroine, the author comments:

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“All of them emerge in situations of intense feeling and emotional exaltation when the speaker is liberated from the bondage of her cramping personal self, and voices some great universal idea whose full value even she may not have realized at the moment. Their themes are Love, Life and God.”

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In the end there is a very remarkable comparison with Shakespeare who, according to the author, “started with the idea of the comedy of the Middle Ages but depleted it of its religious atmosphere. His plays are characterized by the absence of religion. They have more of the Renaissance humanism and zest for life.”

But *The Viziers*, says the author, “presents in bold relief characters with a well-defined mental love for God and acceptance of His will. They could say in the great crises of their lives the great words of Dante, ‘In His will is our peace’ . . . This romantic comedy is the declaration of the soul of the creative artist of Faith in the supreme Architect of life and His master-plan of ultimate victory and triumph over Matter”.

The third play is Sri Aurobindo’s *Perseus the Deliverer*. This play, according to the author, “embodies Sri Aurobindo’s vision of cosmic evolution from a state of crude and evil religion based on fear and division and violent cruelty presided over by an Undivine and even Anti-divine occult power to the condition of a pure and refined worship of a divine light, a compassionate, calm and benignant Force with its law of love and union in relationship with and mastery over the forces of Nature”. This play, in the hands of Sri Aurobindo, is the richest in symbolic overtones of revolutionary epochs when great souls descend on earth, alike divine and diabolic, and align themselves

either as instruments of the progressive forces or on the side of the forces of retrogression.

Seetharaman has analysed each character in detail separately. He assigns it its role in the great symphony and thus is how in a few pregnant phrases and bold strokes he presents to us the whole pageant of characters.

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“The amorphous and the heterogeneous, the conservative and the deeply rooted, the transitional and the halfway-housed, the revolutionary and the already new-born, the uprooted and the sceptical, the witty and the humorous and the eternally and spontaneously childlike are depicted with remarkable individuality and characteristic mutual responses and orientations to the coming light.”

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In the same manner the author deals with *Vasavadutta*. This is an Indian romance of ancient times when the Indian political and cultural life was richly spangled with small kingdoms each developing its own artistic and social traditions vying with rival states for influence and prestige. This play, according to the author, is “a Dramatic Romance of the Psychicised life-spirit evolving, growing and maturing in this world of earth consciousness guided by the twin values of Love and Beauty and realizing the Delight of Existence, *ānanda*”.

Last in the series is the Norwegian play *Eric*. The author’s introductory note to the play is a masterly exposition of the true nature of poetic drama. In it there is always behind the clash of forces a pressure of the new and higher values of life to emerge and take firm root and usher in a new era of life.

“An awareness,” says the author, “of this world of values enveloping all movements and a communication through all the resources of language of this vision of values working themselves out in and through the forces and characters, constitute the essence of poetic Drama.” This recalls to our minds Sri Aurobindo’s own words on the subject, unique in their revelatory power in his book *The Future Poetry*:

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. . . drama is the poet’s vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul, it is in a way his vision of Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word; and at its highest point it becomes a poetic rendering or illustration of the Aeschylean drasanti pathein, “the doer shall feel the effect of his act,” in an inner as well as an outer, a happy no less than an austere significance, whether that effect be represented as psychological or vital, whether it comes to its own through sorrow and calamity, ends in a judgment by laughter or finds an escape into beauty and joy, whether the presentation be tragic or comic or tragicomic or idyllic.<sup>50</sup>

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This slim volume has a very lucid foreword by Dr. C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University. It is bound to prove of great value to the students of these plays which are sure to gain more and more attention in India and abroad containing as they do poetic speeches of rare beauty, power and majesty. We whole-

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<sup>50</sup> CWSA 26: 75

heartedly congratulate Annamalai University for this venture. And we hope it will stimulate more and more interest in these plays.





**Life is indispensable to the completeness of the creative spiritual realisation, but life released, transformed, uplifted, not the ordinary mentalised human-animal life, nor the demoniac or Titanic, nor even the divine and the undivine mixed together.**

**- Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 24: 569)**

# Deepening My Understanding of Relationships

*Chitra Kolluru*

**Editor's note:** Chitra Kolluru who like most women wears many hats — working professional, mother, wife, daughter and more — writes a heartfelt reflective piece. She shares how her understanding of human relations has been deepening as she makes conscious effort to be an aspirant on the path of Integral Yoga.

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How else can I write about relationships and Yoga without reflecting on my own relationships at home and at work, with extended family and with friends?

My mind goes to the relationships I treasure, and also the ones I sometimes don't value until I am pulled away from them. It also goes to the ones that inspire me with their intermittent touch, the ones I want to build but am shy to go beyond my mental boundaries, and also the ones that I lost along the way. And then there are the relations that were not meant to be, were short-lived and yet taught me a thing or two, the ones whose value I realised after I lost them from my life, life that kept me busy in its dealings.

As I think of all these relationships, I cannot help but question – how do we form relationships?

We are born into a family by providence and form natural relationships with our parents, grandparents, and siblings. There are also friendships and other relations based on mutual affection and

care. And then there are a few others that are formed due to certain special situations.

Within two years of our move to a new residential community, Covid struck and all socializing stopped. We all were locked in our houses and at best were allowed to socialize within a small community. Within a few months, we had made some very thick friendships. We were friends who came close owing to the situation we all were faced with. But once the times changed, only some friendships stuck on.

The Gita talks about our *gunas* driving all our behaviours including how we build and behave in our relationships. All of us carry a different combination of the three *gunas* — Tamoguna, Rajoguna and Satoguna – which drive all action and choices. The Tamoguna signifies inertia, procrastination, fatalistic attitude, choices based on immediate convenience as opposed to any deeper aspiration.

The Rajoguna signifies ego-driven ambition, passion without reins, focusing on the ego-self and an ego-centric motive to everything one chooses, including the way we relate with people in our lives.

The Satoguna signifies a balanced approach to things and choices in life and seeks for harmony. But since this too is part of *prakriti*, nature, and therefore can still be overpowered by the natural impulses driven by other two *gunas* when we make our choices in life. Hence our seers and sages have been guiding us to constantly elevate ourselves in our consciousness and work towards a greater and greater self-discipline and self-mastery.

To illustrate, in the Mahabharata, Dhritarashtra's relationship with Duryodhana was primarily driven by *moha* (attachment) without any parental guidance. The father-son relation was in fact a victim to ambition and greed. Karna's relationship to Duryodhana was also

based on an aggressive rajasic motive. Karna's motive was of returning the favour Duryodhana had done to him when he made him a king and boosted his ego.

The Indian spiritual cultural tradition emphasises Dharma as the true basis for organising our individual and collective life.

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“The idea of the Dharma is, next to the idea of the Infinite, its major chord; Dharma, next to spirit, is its foundation of life.”<sup>51</sup>

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Thus, our relationships must also be grounded in Dharma. Dharma is not a common or a standard or a stagnant rule of law or even a duty. It is dynamic and eternal in the sense that it is relevant to the time and person in question and driven by the inner law and soul-driven turning of an individual rather than any external societal norms or conventions. Dharma is even above and beyond the ordinary mind-based law. It has a higher ethical component to it, but is again not limited by mind-informed sense of morality.

Dharma, not the *gunas*, must guide our actions, our choices, and our relationships. That means our higher and deeper aspirations and not what pleases us in this moment must guide us through life.

The Kathopanishad talks about *shreyas* — the path that is good, and *preyas* – that is pleasing. In life we are always faced with these two paths. Choosing either of the two has an outcome associated with it. In the present context, it may mean choosing to be with people who

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<sup>51</sup> CWSA 20: 148

can hold us on our journey or stay the course with us, whose presence helps us become more authentic, honest, sincere.

We must ask ourselves — are we able to look beyond what the senses show us when we pick the people with whom we want to associate or enter long-term relationship of any kind? It is also important to reflect on how we nurture a relationship. For example, what drives our conversations with others? Is it honesty or hypocrisy? What builds a sense of trust in any relationship? Is it merely an emotional connection with the other person, or simply a matter of convenience or habit? Or is truth the basis of mutual trust?

Two years back, with the Mother's Grace and with some motivation from family and friends, I started reading Sri Aurobindo and attending some *satsangs*. I really felt that this is how the Mother held me by her hand and showed me the way. Since then, I have started to look at my relationships in a new light.

I have come to realise that my husband, my daughter and my son, while living their lives are also part of my life to fulfill something in me, to teach me something, to help my soul progress on its journey, to take a few more steps in this life towards the Divine. I also realise that I can see this only when I step away from them into moments of solitude.

I understand that my husband's indifference, his love for physical fitness are here to teach me. My daughter's calmness combined with her lack of sensitivity and my son's meanness and his outpouring emotion, are all my guides to something bigger. My mom's concerning word and unsolicited advice, no matter how irritating, is what I need.

And more importantly, I tread more consciously and carefully when it comes to choosing the friends with whom to spend my time. I am trying to become more careful when I tend to judge others. I try to remember the Mother and remind myself that the truth is not just what meets the eye, it's what lies beneath, and that is hard to unearth.

During the past two years, the Mother has sent her messengers into my life to touch me, so that I may breathe, feel, experience tenderness as I slowly learn to accept what comes my way in the form of life. That I do not have it easy and shallow and yet do not break prematurely.

I have my therapist who is easily my newest and best friend. And there is my Homeopathic doctor who urged me to take it slow. I also have my Ayurvedic doctor who is proud and loud but unabashedly agrees to God working through his treatment and is humble like that. Then there is my *satsang* guide who is kind yet detached to show me the way.

I also have friends who have reentered my life and who hold me with affection. But I also realise now that those friends who slipped away – perhaps because I made some choices based on my inner calling – they too have taught me what the Mother wants me to learn. Not always have I given all these messengers credit, but I say today a silent prayer for their presence and exit.

Rishi Yagnavalka says in the Isha Upanishad, the self loves the wife, not for the wife but for the self. I remind myself that I have no need to go forward and make friends, show off, pass favours or do the uncomfortable. I need to build the courage to be honest and stay grounded in my Dharma, and learn along the way so that I may progress through all the relationships in my life.

**ALL TRUE LOVE AND ALL SACRIFICE  
are in their essence Nature's  
contradiction of the primary egoism  
and its separative error;  
it is her attempt to turn from  
a necessary first fragmentation  
towards a recovered ONENESS.**

- Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 23: 107)



# Shilpi – Who Saw and Sang

*Gayatri Majumdar*

**Editor’s note:** Gayatri Majumdar pens a poem that evokes a range of subtle emotions that make up most of our human relations. And yet there is always that gentle reminder, a call even to transcend the bondage of those emotions towards an inner freedom which alone can be the true basis for any relationship.

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There was no mistaking –  
the name distinct in sindoor-red

শিল্পী নিকেতন . . .

As his voice crescendoed with *bhakti*  
and sank with the sweet *rasa*-s of those *swara*-s,  
the *tabla*’s rhythm stringing divinity  
with moments upon moments of inner cognizance.

The audience cramming his silence  
sat dutiful enraptured – the air  
conditioning hearts, now warmer.

The *shilpi*'s life organized neat his measured gait,  
blue Camlin Ink on decades-old now-brittle pages,  
torn-edged covers of yellow notebooks; things absent –  
not visible to the eye – inched closer  
around him, and not at a very great distance  
sat lamps in corners resting in their own sepia chit . . .

The stillness mixed with the descent – palpable  
to all, mostly to those who could be absent.  
His voice now tremored with gratitude  
and total surrender; his expanding heart  
opening floodgates to all those  
who invariably return  
bearing fruits, of course,  
of loss, grief, hurt, pain, partings  
and other many hues he knows as love.

His breath quickened as he took a while  
to locate the next song –  
investigating pages and lifetimes, half-anxious,  
certain it was there somewhere,  
Here!

The harmonium shifted ebonies and whites  
– sobbing – with despair, delight,  
in tune with a childhood Kutchi folksong  
lifting to space – light.

The basement teared up  
flooding green and maroon cushions,  
someone’s silver hair and sockless fables,  
some books lining shelves incredibly named,  
*Growing Within, Living Within and Pain, the Hammer of God.*

In the timelessness of half-remembrance  
and total dissolution,  
the tiny room sloughed to cosmic *tala-s* –  
lost – not intent on ever finding its way back.



It is not the love that someone feels  
for you that can make you happy,  
**it is the love you feel for others**  
**that makes you happy:**  
for you receive the love that you give  
from the Divine, who loves eternally  
and unfailingly.

- The Mother (CWM, 14: 122)

With Gratitude  
to  
the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

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