

In the path of Sri Aurobindo



**Santosh Krinsky,
longtime promoter
of holistic products,
describes his
spiritual quest**

QUESTION: *How long have you been a student of Sri Aurobindo's yoga?*

SANTOSH: I first came in contact with Sri Aurobindo's writings in 1971, so it is more than 32 years now.

QUESTION: *How did you get interested in this path?*

SANTOSH: I was attending college majoring in psychology, sociology and philosophy at the time. It was a time of major protest against the Vietnam War and I was active in starting a food coop and protesting the war. At a certain point in time I understood that nothing was going to change based on political forces changing, but that the underlying issues of human nature were going to simply continue recreating the same problems time and again. This was the lesson of history.

I became convinced that the only true change was through a change in consciousness. The result of this was that I dropped out of school and because of certain inner experiences I was undergoing, I began studying yoga. I spent some time reading works by Ouspensky, Steiner and other modern European writers, and eventually traveled to Europe where I undertook a very serious study of Tibetan Buddhist yoga teachings and Swami Vivekananda's book *Raja Yoga*. I did not have a lot of guidance and was just trying to practice by reading the books and carrying out their directions. It was obviously difficult.

During my stay in Germany someone put Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* into my hands and when I opened it, it seemed to be speaking directly to me. I don't know how to describe the experience, other than that it all seemed so natural and real to me in terms of how he described the very issues I was struggling with internally. It was obvious that he had real experience and had "seen" a direction that was real and meaningful. The rest, as they say, is "history."

QUESTION: *What did you do to follow up on this interest?*

SANTOSH: The first thing I did was to begin to read everything I could get my hands on by Sri Aurobindo, who was after all a prolific writer. This occupied quite some time. It was also somewhat of a challenge. I had no steady job, no money and was living basically from day to day. I was in a foreign country. I found a metaphysical bookstore called Middle Earth and basically spent my days there. The people were very kind to me and let me stay there, read books all day and drink herb tea. If I occasionally got a few dollars I bought some incense from them!

QUESTION: *And you have been committed to this path ever since?*

SANTOSH: Yes. It was clear to me that Sri Aurobindo had a very clear understanding of human psychology, the traditional paths of yoga, and the needs of the time. He also had a strong sense about the process of social and political change which resonated with my own background quite well. He was clearly pointing out that true change is inner change, a change of consciousness, and that must be the foundation of any change in society, if it is to be meaningful, lasting and positive.

QUESTION: *Can you tell us a little about Sri Aurobindo's life?*

SANTOSH: Recognizing that Sri Aurobindo himself did not put much stock in "biography" on an outer level, I can tell you that he was a leading proponent in India for attaining independence from British rule around the beginning of the 20th century. He started a magazine and was arrested for sedition by the British, but was not convicted. He was accused later of running a revolutionary cell and was implicated by the British in a bomb conspiracy case. He was jailed and put on trial. While in jail he began to experience various yogic experiences and eventually he was acquitted and freed, but the time in jail turned his direction toward yoga.

He had another experience where his brother was extremely ill and a wandering yogi came through and by chanting mantras over a glass of water was able to cure his brother's illness. He reflected on this and decided that anything that was that powerful was going to be an important force in achieving independence. This led him to the practice of yoga. He experienced the silence of the mind and a number of further experiences along the path of yoga, and finally, he recognized that India's independence was assured, and he saw his real destiny was in working out the practice of yoga in his own life.

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He moved to Pondicherry in South India and spent some 40 years or so writing, practicing yoga and guiding a large number of people who joined him there over time at his Ashram or retreat. From 1926 to 1950 he actually lived in a small suite of rooms and focused on his yogic concentrations and writing what is perhaps one of the most moving poetic works with true mantric force behind it, called *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*.

He wrote and rewrote this more than 700-page poem outlining the history of human life and evolution, the role of man in the cosmos and the seeking and practice of yoga and the eventual transformation of consciousness that can bring about a new world of peace, harmony, beauty and joy.

QUESTION: *Can you describe Sri Aurobindo's teaching or yoga briefly?*

SANTOSH: It is somewhat of a challenge to do that briefly, given that Sri Aurobindo himself wrote extensively. However, there are certainly some major lines of understanding that he develops and which are themes that could be discussed. First and foremost, I believe, Sri Aurobindo has addressed the primacy of consciousness creating the entire world, and all the different parts and levels of our being and our lives. He points out that similar to the acorn containing the pattern of the oak tree within it, all beings in the universe have our own pattern contained "in seed" within us. We are therefore all evolving, or manifesting if you will, what we are in our deepest essence.

Sri Aurobindo was not trying to develop a creed, cult, religion or movement. He has very little concern about what religion someone adheres to or what philosophy they adopt. Of much more interest to him is whether they are culturing consciousness within themselves and gaining a deeper insight and understanding about their own lives and practicing the techniques that help them gain insight and mastery in their own lives.

QUESTION: *What kind of techniques are we talking about here?*

SANTOSH: Sri Aurobindo describes basically all the different methods of culturing consciousness, whether they are called yoga, faith, religious ecstasy, meditation, contemplation, mysticism, and points out that each individual, at various times or stages of their development, may find value in any or all of these methods. They are all available for use by the seeker at the appropriate time and in the right circumstances. No single technique is "prescribed" for everyone at all times because he understands the uniqueness and individuality of the circumstances and the needs of the seeker.

At the same time, he has helped develop a framework to put these various techniques in perspective so that one can clearly understand what is going on and why, and know when the tool is there to aid one, and when it has become a hindrance or obstacle and has to be overpassed.

QUESTION: *What distinguishes Sri Aurobindo's yoga from others?*

SANTOSH: I would say that for me the clear distinction is the ability to utilize a variety of methods but to remain focused on the primary goal, which is the culturing of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has also clarified the role of the soul or psychic being in the evolutionary process, and its ability to act as the leader or guide of the instruments of our physical life on Earth through the mind, the life force and emotions, and the body.

Finally, Sri Aurobindo has made it clear that we are looking at a very narrow slice of time and evolutionary stage of the universe and that within a larger context, our human capacities and processes are not the final term of that evolution, but an intermediate stage. He shows the progression of the evolution of consciousness from a completely "involved" state as found in matter, through a stage where life energy

and awareness begin to evolve in the plant and later the animal stages, to the point where a higher mental awareness and self-awareness begins to be seen at the human level.

He indicates that this is by no means the final stage of the evolution of consciousness and that there are other stages of consciousness, beyond the mental level, where new powers of integration and understanding are at play. Our disharmonies in the mental world can be resolved through the integrative, global vision of the next stage of evolution of consciousness. Eventually he called the fully integrated, knowledge-consciousness level the "supramental" level, meaning simply, "beyond the mind."

His aim is the actual transformation of life itself rather than an otherworldly focus on salvation or escape from life. He speaks about the development of a "divine life on Earth" based on the manifestation of this new level of consciousness and its ability to restructure life, replacing disharmony and imperfect understanding with harmony, light and freedom.

QUESTION: *Is there any introductory book you could recommend for people to get started in understanding Sri Aurobindo's yoga?*

SANTOSH: There are really some very good introductions available. *The Future Evolution of Man* gives a great overview of the vast evolutionary sweep and the steps along the way. *The Integral Yoga: Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Practice* is a great book for both getting an overview of the philosophical perspective and learning about the various steps and practices for integrating this into one's life.

In the end, Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that just reading or studying is insufficient. One must actually practice in order to get results. I think it is this very practical focus on bringing the teachings into one's life on a daily basis that is perhaps one of the most valuable points that Sri Auro-

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bindo makes repeatedly.

QUESTION: *Are there any closing thoughts you would like to add here?*

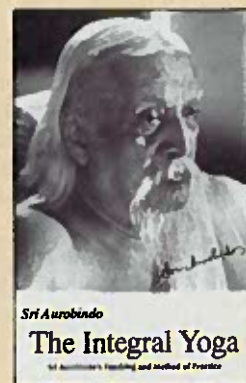
SANTOSH: I have always been very interested in seeing how individual and social change go hand in hand. Sri Aurobindo's statement in this regard is a guiding light for this concern: "The most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge . . ." As a practical person, and someone who is interested in the survival of humanity and the development of a more enlightened humanity that becomes a true caretaker for the planet, this issue resonates with me on a daily basis.

QUESTION: *We would like to thank you for sharing your insights about Sri Aurobindo with us. How would you characterize Sri Aurobindo's significance in today's troubled world?*

SANTOSH: Thank you. I would like to mention that it is very hard for any individual to truly provide the "essence" of what Sri Aurobindo is saying to us in our struggles at this time in human history, and I would encourage your readers to take the opportunity to engage his writings for themselves. Regardless of the path or spiritual discipline, I have always found that there is a value to having a relationship with great minds, great souls and great thinkers, as they help to clarify, uplift and guide, even if their teachings are vastly different from my own beliefs.

Sri Aurobindo certainly is one of those souls whose writings can be of such value to just about anyone, even if the contact is brief. In fact, many of today's great authors have acknowledged the role that Sri Aurobindo has played in their own formulations, people such as Ken Wilbur [noted academic and author], Michael Murphy [founder of Esalen and author] and others. Many modern-day yogis such as Sri Chinmoy and Swami Satchidananda also found inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's work. His integrative awareness, his blending of the energy of the West with the insight and inner practices of the East make his efforts particularly relevant to the struggles going on everywhere in the world today.

Santosh Krinsky, one of the new owners of New Leaf Distributing Co., is the founder of Lotus Light and Lotus Press. He has been involved in the metaphysical and natural health industries on an active basis since 1974.



Books by Sri Aurobindo

BASES OF YOGA (new edition), \$6.95, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, ISBN 0941524779.

(THE) BHAGAVAD GITA & ITS MESSAGE, \$15.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524787 (Sanskrit text, translation & Sri Aurobindo's commentary)

ESSAYS ON THE GITA (Life Companion Library), \$19.95 (q), Lotus Press, ISBN 0914955187 (Deluxe Edition; Sanskrit & English text)

GREATER PSYCHOLOGY...The Psychological Thought of Sri Aurobindo, edited by A.S. Dalal, \$25.95 (H), Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc., ISBN 1585420891

HUMAN CYCLE: The Psychology of Social Development, \$14.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0914955446

HYMNS TO THE MYSTIC FIRE, \$17.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0914955225 (Sanskrit text, English translation, Sri Aurobindo's commentary)

IDEAL OF HUMAN UNITY, \$17.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0914955438

(THE) INTEGRAL YOGA: Sri Aurobindo's Teaching & Method of Practice, \$14.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524760

(THE) LIFE DIVINE (q) (reissue), \$29.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524612

(THE) LIFE DIVINE (H), \$39.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524620

(THE) MOTHER, \$2.95 (pocket-sized), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, ISBN 0941524795

(THE) MOTHER: With Letters on The Mother & Translations of Prayers & Meditations, \$14.00, Lotus Press, ISBN 8170580102

REBIRTH & KARMA, \$9.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524639

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIMSELF, \$12.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 8170580196

SRI AUROBINDO SELECTED WRITINGS, \$29.95 (CD-ROM for Windows or Macintosh), Lotus Press, ISBN 0914955888

SAVITRI, \$24.95 (H), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, ISBN 0941524809

SECRET OF THE VEDA, \$19.95, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, ISBN 0914955195

SYNTHESIS OF YOGA, \$29.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524655

SYNTHESIS OF YOGA, \$34.95 (H), Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524663

UPANISHADS, \$17.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0914955233 (Sanskrit text, translation & Sri Aurobindo's commentary)

VEDIC SYMBOLISM, \$9.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524302

WISDOM OF THE UPANISHADS, \$7.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524434

Books by Sri Aurobindo & The Mother

GROWING WITHIN: Psychology of Inner Development, \$9.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 094152471X

HIDDEN FORCES OF LIFE: Compiled, the Works of Sri Aurobindo & The Mother, \$9.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524604

LIVING WITHIN: Yoga Approach to Psychological Health & Growth, \$8.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524221

LOOKING WITHIN: A Seeker's Guide to Mastery & Inner Growth, \$6.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524817

POWERS WITHIN, \$5.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524965

PSYCHIC BEING: Soul—Its Nature, Mission & Evolution, \$8.95, Lotus Press, ISBN 0941524566

Books about Sri Aurobindo

SRI AUROBINDO, OR THE ADVENTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS by Satprem, \$15.95, Institute for Evolutionary Research, ISBN 8185137609

LIFE & TEACHINGS OF SRI AUROBINDO & THE MOTHER by Karmayogi, \$10.00, Mere Cie Inc., ISBN 9991407952