

THE PEACOCK LETTER



THE INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE STUDY CENTER

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CONTENTS

THE QUEST OF THE SOUL
Rand Hicks 3

PEACOCK'S FAN
4

THE IDEAL SPIRIT OF POETRY
Sri Aurobindo 5

THE DUAL BEING
Sri Aurobindo 7

THE INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE STUDY CENTER

The Integral Knowledge Study Center was formed in 1979, when a visit from India by M. P. Pandit and Vasanti Rao brought together a number of seekers into a collective endeavour of study, meditation, and inner growth. The overarching goal of the Center, in harmony with the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, has since been to aid in the discovery of the secret soul of delight that dwells within each person, and to promote the integral perfection of life that can flow from this discovery of authentic being.

A number of activities are sponsored that support this spiritual search, but the core of the Center's collective life is a weekly study group that meets on Sunday evenings. Appropriate books drawn from the extensive literature of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother serve as the focus of these meetings, where probing, positive discussions among the participants enhance clarity and lead into a concluding group meditation.

Among other public offerings are seminars and workshops covering a wide variety of themes relating to spiritual life, the viewing of significant films dealing with the growth of consciousness, and the occasional sponsorship of guest speakers. Private counselling and instruction in meditation are also available for individuals through the Center without charge.

On August 15, 1983, Sri Aurobindo's Relics were inaugurated at the Center. It marked the first time that the Relics had ever left India for another country. For many seekers in America the Relics offer profound significance and continuing inspiration.

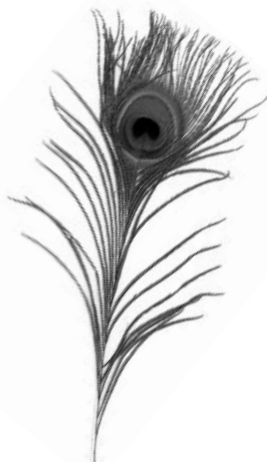
THE PEACOCK LETTER

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THE QUEST OF THE SOUL

Rand Hicks

It is the Mother's birthday. We commemorate the day especially because of the spiritual path she blazed for us, because her dynamic life of the soul established beautiful forms in every sphere and plane of the manifested universe. She reminds us that we too are in essence the psyche.

Full of wonder, eager to grow, avid to know, the soul in us loves life. The mystery of the universe is an irresistible riddle, an obscure proposition, but it is not a condemnation. We did not fall from grace to arrive here. It is a swan dive that brings us into the cosmos, a deliberate descent of the immortal spirit into the waters of the unknown. But the soul's self-born knowledge as it resurfaces assures that these waters are good, that dangers and deceits and deflections are worth the suffering.

To get to that, our work is quite simple: to penetrate the essence of each experience until we taste the sap it contains, the psychic essence that imbues a situation. Anything can transfer us from the superficial to the profound if we follow it all the way back to the creating delight that gave it birth. Behind every experience is a felicity, a blessedness, a happiness that links us to the whole, away from riveting ignorance and towards luminous and free knowledge.

A sadhana, a path that leads straight to spiritual experience and founds an insight into the truth of existence, cannot be easy. Leaving a perspective, a personality, a slice of world-experience that chains us to a small definition of self and world demands courage. By living in the soul, we can wrestle free from the ego's control. And when we shear ourselves away from all that, when the wonder within, *adbhutam*, is released, then that flame flares up and rejoins the central fire from which it originally sparked. All is one. All is felicity unending. The immortal has recovered its eternity. The experience of life is fundamentally different, for the awareness never leaves the soul-center except to stretch itself into the vastness of the Self. That is the inner base from which the world is met.

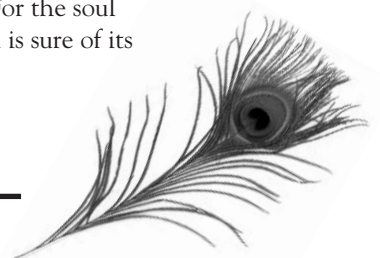
A further question persists. In meeting the world, in dealing with the nature and rhythms



of body and life, in suffusing the mind with the light of a truer self, the liberated being still meets the intransigence of those members. True, the instruments are affected, enhanced, upraised by the light within, yet they do not accept an instantaneous and entire transformation. Old rhythms persist or return, some facets rebel against the light. The vehicle is inapt to move at spirit speed. So do we sit safe above or do we work in the world?

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo refused to retire into the vast of sheer Brahman, refused the fields empyrean; they marched with endurance, *titikṣā*, into life as it is in order to transform it. Their efforts have made it easier for us who follow. On the transformative journey, we recognise by intuitive tact what they have touched and changed. The liberated spirit, seated above and charged with light, now attempts to transfer timeless qualities to a time-formed instrument. This takes time. The realisation of the Self is not magic. It does not confer instantaneous change to the nature. That is why Sri Aurobindo aims at a means by which the power of the spirit could register in matter. It is remarkably difficult. If those granted spiritual release, though, hold back from this pioneering work, then the world is consigned forever to its ignorance. Only those illumined from within can throw off ignorance, and they can best do it by installing knowledge and love and beatitude in the whole being, all the way down to the cells.

Religions claim a happy ending for the aspirant who attains spiritual release. For the soul who knows its place in the cosmos and is sure of its Self, it is a happy beginning.



PEACOCK'S FAN

This is the first digital edition of *The Peacock Letter*. To lighten our footprint upon the earth, its printed publication ceased with the issue of 24 November 2009. We intend to continue the newsletter online at a website to be developed, where past issues will be archived. Other aspects of the Center's activities remain unchanged. Our course on the Yoga Sutras concluded in December, studies in the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are moving apace in our Sunday satsangs, we welcome seekers from around the country, and our daily meditations continue.

Vasanti Rao, a singer and dancer from diviner doors and one of the most radiant figures in the long life of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, quietly marked her 80th birth anniversary on the 9th of February. A chorus of friends from around the globe sang their grateful felicitations to her. Congratulations, Vasanti!

THE IDEAL SPIRIT OF POETRY

Sri Aurobindo

To attempt to presage the future turn or development of mind or life in any of its fields must always be a hazardous venture. For life and mind are not like physical Nature; the processes of physical Nature run in precise mechanical grooves, but these are more mobile and freer powers. The gods of life and still more the gods of mind are so incalculably self-creative that even where we can distinguish the main lines on which the working runs or has so far run, we are still unable to foresee with any certainty what turn they will yet take or of what new thing they are in labour. It is therefore impossible to predict what the poetry of the future will actually be like. We can see where we stand today, but we cannot tell where we shall stand a quarter of a century hence. All that one can do is to distinguish for oneself some possibilities that lie before the poetic mind of the race and to figure what it can achieve if it chooses to follow out certain great openings which the genius of recent and contemporary poets has made free to us; but what path it will actually choose to tread or what new heights attempt, waits still for its own yet unformed decision.

What would be the ideal spirit of poetry in an age of the increasingly intuitive mind: that is the question which arises from all that has gone before and to which we may attempt some kind of answer. I have spoken in the beginning of the Mantra as the highest and intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression. What the Vedic poets meant by the Mantra was an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm, *chandas*. For the seeing could not be separated from the hearing; it was one act. Nor could the living of the truth in oneself which we mean by realisation, be separated from either, for the presence of it in the soul and its possession of the mind must precede or accompany in the creator or human channel that expression of the inner sight and hearing which takes the shape of the luminous word. The Mantra is born through the heart and shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of that godhead of the Eternal of whom the truth seen is a face or a form. And in the mind too of the fit outward hearer who listens to the word of the poet-seer, these three must come together, if our word is a real Mantra; the sight of the inmost truth must accompany the hearing, the possession of the inmost spirit of it by the mind and its coming home to the soul must accompany or follow immediately upon the rhythmic message of the Word and the mind's sight of the Truth. That may sound a rather mystic account of the matter, but substantially there could hardly be a more complete description of the birth and effect of the inspired and revealing word, and it might be applied, though usually on a more lowered scale than was intended by the Vedic Rishis, to all the highest outbursts of a really great poetry. But poetry is the Mantra only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. And the ancient poets of the Veda and Upanishads claimed to be uttering the Mantra because always it was this inmost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed

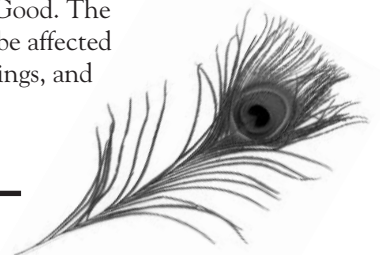


themselves to be using or finding its innate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by the divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The Mantra in other words is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite.

This is a theory of poetry, a view of the rhythmic and creative self-expression to which we give that name, which is very different from any that we now hold, a sacred or hieratic *ars poetica* only possible in days when man believed himself to be near to the gods and felt their presence in his bosom and could think he heard some accents of their divine and eternal wisdom take form on the heights of his mind. And perhaps no thinking age has been so far removed from any such view of our life as the one through which we have recently passed and even now are not well out of its shadow, the age of materialism, the age of positive outward matter of fact and of scientific and utilitarian reason. And yet curiously enough — or naturally, since in the economy of Nature opposite creates itself out of opposite and not only like from like, — it is to some far-off light at least of the view of ourselves at our greatest of which such ideas were a concretised expression that we seem to be returning. For we can mark that although in very different circumstances, in broader forms, with a more complex mind and an enormously enlarged basis of culture and civilisation, the gain and inheritance of many intermediate ages, it is still to something very like the effort which was the soul of the Vedic or at least the Vedantic mind that we almost appear to be on the point of turning back in the circle of our course. Now that we have seen minutely what is the material reality of the world in which we live and have some knowledge of the vital reality of the Force from which we spring, we are at last beginning to seek again for the spiritual reality of that which we and all things secretly are. Our minds are once more trying to envisage



the self, the spirit of Man and the spirit of the universe, intellectually, no doubt, at first, but from that to the old effort at sight, at realisation within ourselves and in all is not a very far step. And with this effort there must rise too on the human mind the conception of the godheads in whom this Spirit, this marvellous Self and Reality which broods over the world, takes shape in the liberated soul and life of the human being, his godheads of Truth and Freedom and Unity, his godheads of a greater more highly visioned Will and Power, his godheads of Love and universal Delight, his godheads of universal eternal Beauty, his godheads of a supreme Light and Harmony and Good. The new ideals of the race seem already to be affected by some first bright shadow of these things, and



even though it be only a tinge, a flush colouring the duller atmosphere of our recent mentality, there is every sign that this tinge will deepen and grow, in the heavens to which we look up if not at once in the earth of our actual life.

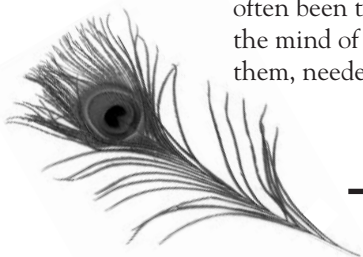
But this new vision will not be as in the old times something hieratically remote, mystic, inward, shielded from the profane, but rather a sight which will endeavour to draw these godheads again to close and familiar intimacy with our earth and embody them not only in the heart of religion and philosophy, nor only in the higher flights of thought and art, but also, as far as may be, in the common life and action of man. For in the old days these things were Mysteries, which men left to the few, to the initiates and by so leaving them lost sight of them in the end, but the endeavour of this new mind is to reveal, to divulge and to bring near to our comprehension all mysteries, — at present indeed making them too common and outward in the process and depriving them of much of their beauty and inner light and depth, but that defect will pass, — and this turn towards an open realisation may well lead to an age in which man as a race will try to live in a greater Truth than has as yet governed our kind. For all that we know, we now tend to make some attempt to form clearly and live. His creation too will then be moved by another spirit and cast on other lines.

And if this takes place or even if there is some strong mental movement towards it, poetry may recover something of an old sacred prestige. There will no doubt still be plenty of poetical writing which will follow the old lines and minister to the old commoner aesthetic motives, and it is as well that it should be so, for the business of poetry is to express the soul of man to himself and to embody in the word whatever power of beauty he sees; but also there may now emerge too and take the first place souls no longer niggardly of the highest flame, the poet-seer and seer-creator, the poet who is also a Rishi, master singers of Truth, hierophants and magicians of a diviner and more universal beauty. There has no doubt always been something of that in the greatest masters of poetry in the great ages, but to fulfil such a role has not often been the one fountain idea of their function; the mind of the age has made other demands on them, needed at that time, and the highest things

in this direction have been rare self-exceedings and still coloured by and toned to the half light in which they sang. But if an age comes which is in common possession of a deeper and greater and more inspiring Truth, then its masters of the rhythmic word will at least sing on a higher common level and may rise more often into a fuller intenser light and capture more constantly the greater tones of which this harp of God, to use the Upanishad's description of man's created being, is secretly capable. A greater era of man's living seems to be in promise, whatever nearer and earthier powers may be striving to lead him on a side path away to a less exalted ideal, and with that advent there must come a new great age of his creation different from the past epochs which he counts as his glories and superior to them in its vision and motive. But first there must intervene a poetry which will lead him towards it from the present faint beginnings. It will be aided by new views in philosophy, a changed and extended spirit in science and new revelations in the other arts, in music, painting, architecture, sculpture, as well as high new ideals in life and new powers of a reviving but no longer limited or obscurantist religious mind. A glint of this change is already visible. And in poetry there is already the commencement of such a greater leading; the conscious effort of Whitman, the tone of Carpenter, the significance of the poetry of A. E., the rapid immediate fame of Tagore are its first signs. The idea of the poet who is also the Rishi has made again its appearance. Only a wider spreading of the thought and mentality in which that idea can live and the growth of an accomplished art of poetry in which it can take body, are still needed to give the force of permanence to what is now only an incipient and just emerging power. Mankind satiated with the levels is turning its face once more towards the heights, and the poetic voices that will lead us thither with song will be among the high seer voices. For the great poet interprets to man his present or reinterprets for him his past, but can also point him to his future and in all three reveal to him the face of the Eternal.

[To be concluded]

(From *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, pp. 217-222.)



The Dual Being

*There are two beings in my single self.
A Godhead watches Nature from behind
At play in front with a brilliant surface elf,
A time-born creature with a human mind.*

*Tranquil and boundless like a sea or sky,
The Godhead knows himself Eternity's son.
Radiant his mind and vast, his heart as free;
His will is a sceptre of dominion.*

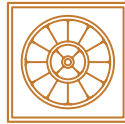
*The smaller self by Nature's passions driven,
Thoughtful and erring learns his human task;
All must be known and to that Greatness given
His mind and life, the mirror and the mask.*

*As with the figure of a symbol dance
The screened Omniscient plays at Ignorance.*

Arichand



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*In the Divine Consciousness
the smallest things from
below unite with
the highest, the most
sublime from above
With my blessings
—*

