

What is Enlightenment?



evolution & enlightenment
for the 21st century

KEN WILBER & ANDREW COHEN
on the Evolution of Enlightenment



In Search of the Immortal **BABAJI**



Why **SRI AUROBINDO** Is Cool



Visions of Evolution with **ROBERT WRIGHT**



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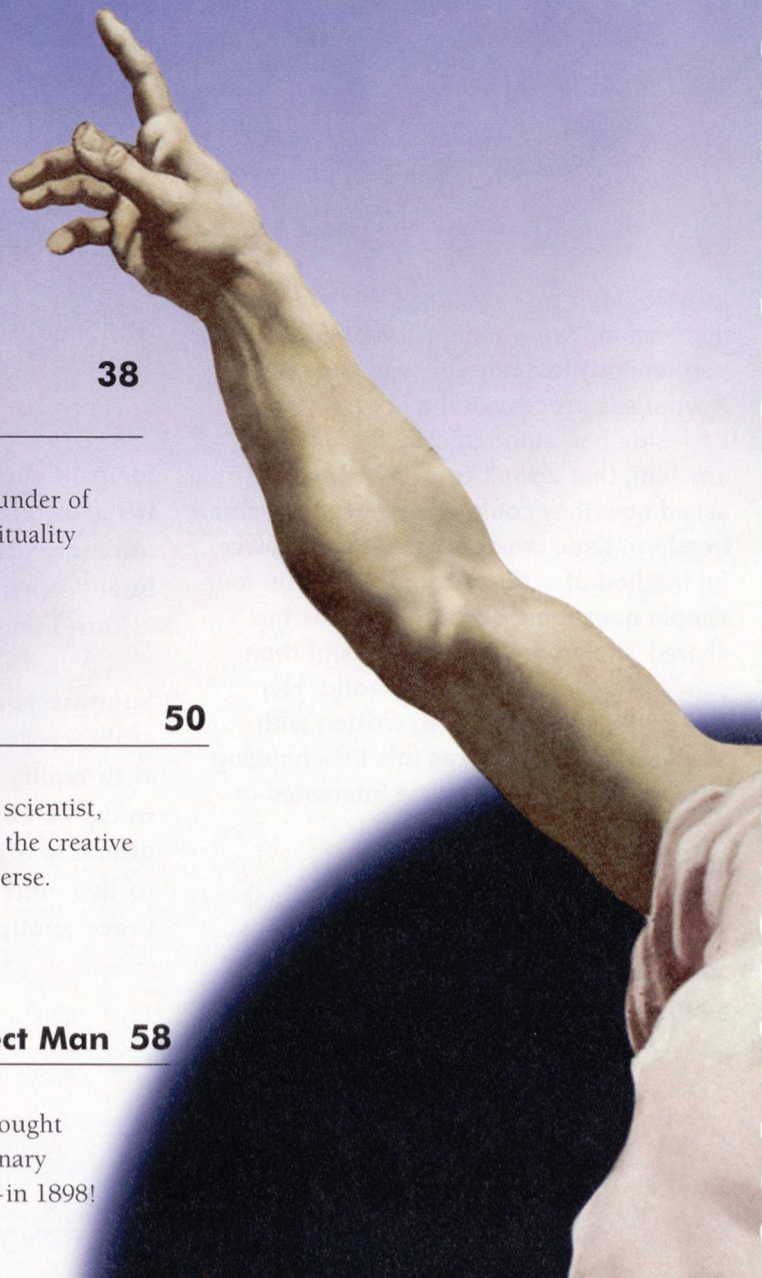
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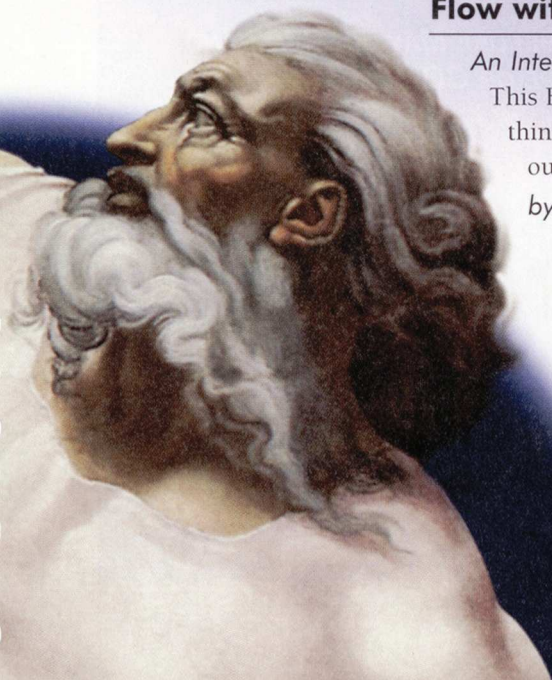


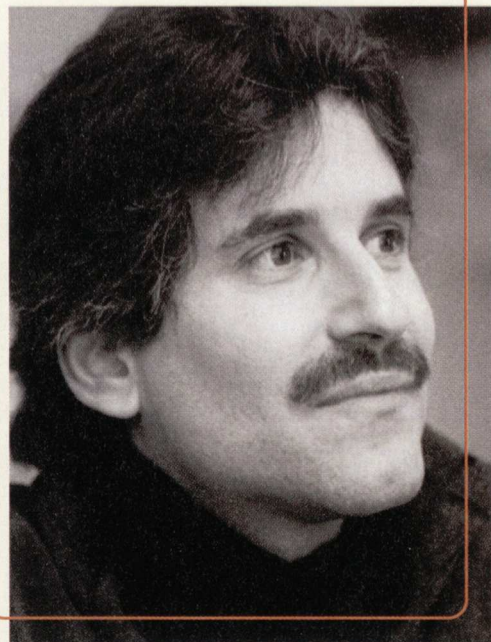
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andrew cohen

founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine

Andrew Cohen is not just a spiritual teacher—he is an inspiring phenomenon. Since his awakening in 1986 he has only lived, breathed, and spoken of one thing: the potential for total liberation from the bondage of ignorance, superstition, and selfishness. Powerless to limit his unceasing investigation, he has looked at the “jewel of enlightenment” from every angle and given birth to a teaching that is vast and subtle, yet incomparably direct and revolutionary in its impact.

Through his public teachings, his books, and his meetings with spiritual leaders from almost every tradition, he has tirelessly sought to convey his discovery that spiritual liberation’s true significance is its potential to completely transform not only the individual but the entire way that human beings, as a race, live together. In sharp contrast to the cynicism that is so pervasive today, yet with full awareness of the challenges that we face, he has dared to teach and to show that it is indeed possible to bring heaven to earth. This powerful message of unity, openness, and love has inspired many who have heard it to join together to prove its reality with their own lives, igniting an ever-expanding international revolution of tremendous vitality and significance.

Andrew travels extensively every year giving public talks and intensive retreats. Centers dedicated to his teachings have formed throughout the world, including an international retreat center in the Berkshire mountains in western Massachusetts, USA, where he now has his home.

As well as being the founder and guiding inspiration behind *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, Andrew Cohen is the author of several books, including *Embracing Heaven & Earth*, *Enlightenment Is a Secret*, and the newly released *Living Enlightenment*.

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Founded in 1988, the Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship is a nonprofit organization inspired by the teachings of Andrew Cohen. This international community of students is united in a commitment to supporting Andrew’s teaching work and to actualizing his revolutionary vision of Impersonal Evolutionary Enlightenment in every aspect of human life. The Impersonal Enlightenment Fellowship has centers in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

For more information about Andrew Cohen, his teachings, and publications, please contact the center nearest you.

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What is Enlightenment? Magazine

"I have found and continue to find that there is so much confusion, misunderstanding, and misinformation as to what enlightenment actually is and what it really means. That is why we publish this magazine: as a vehicle to present our ongoing investigation into this question and to share our discoveries with those who are also interested in this vast and most subtle subject."

Andrew Cohen, Founder

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What Is Enlightenment? (ISSN 1080-3432)
is published semiannually by **MOKSHA PRESS**
the publishing house of the International Fellowship
for the Realization of Impersonal Enlightenment.

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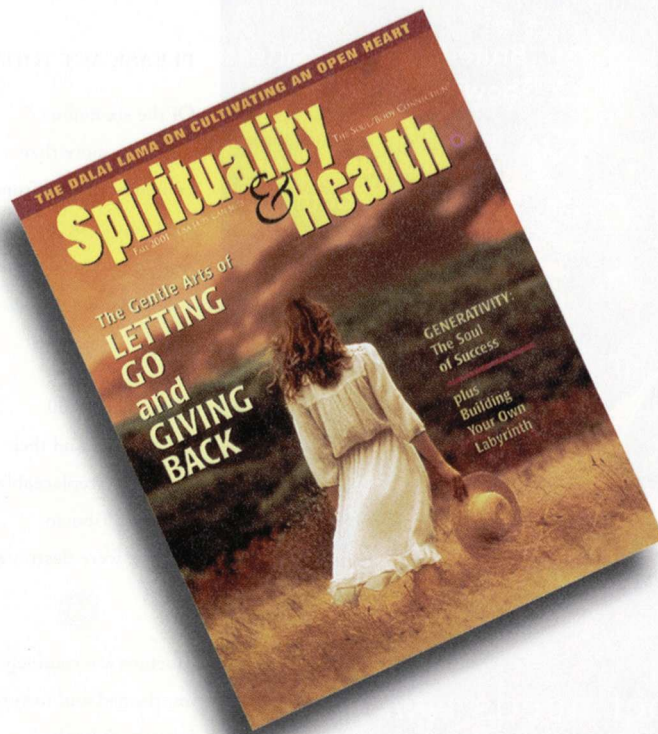
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EDITORIAL CREDITS: Ken Wilber quote, p. 40, from "Mind and the Heart of Emptiness" in *The Quest*, Winter 1995, (p.21); Beatrice Bruteau quote, p. 52, from *The Grand Option*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Beatrice Bruteau quote, p. 52, from *God's Etcetera*, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997, p.9); Beatrice Bruteau quote, p. 57, from *The Grand Option*, (p.60); All quotes from *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda, pp. 78-89, 162-166, used with permission from Self-Realization Fellowship; Sri Daya Mata quote, p. 86, from *Only Love*, (Los Angeles, California: Self-Realization Fellowship); Babaji quote, p. 91, from "Who Am I?", dictated by Babaji to V.T. Neelakantan, published in *Neelakantan, Masterkey to All Ills*, (Madras, India: Kriya Babaji Sangha, 1953 pp. 156-159); Robert Wright quote, p. 98, from *The Moral Animal*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994, p.328); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin quote, p. 98, from *The Human Phenomenon*, (Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 1999, p.152); de Chardin quote, p. 99, from *The Human Phenomenon*, (pp.156, 158); Robert Wright quote, p. 99, from *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2001; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi quote, p. 115, from *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, (Basic Books, 1998 pps. 136-137); Sri Aurobindo quote, p. 168, p. 175, from *The Life Divine*, (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970 pp.3-4).

Special thanks to Tom Huston for his description of Ken Wilber's Four Quadrants (p. 49).



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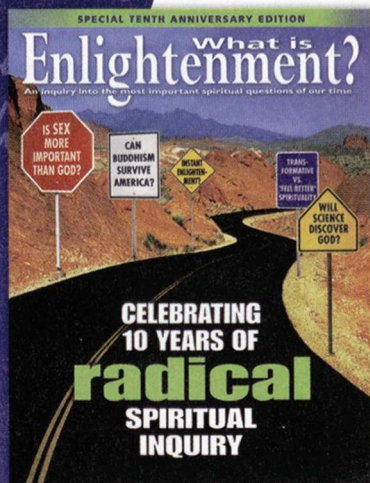
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Letters may be edited for length and clarity.



Issue 20, Fall/Winter 2001

TRANSLATION TO TRANSFORMATION

Re: the Ken Wilber article ["A Spirituality that Transforms"]—let me say that as a lover of the good, true, and beautiful, I find him an inspired writer and I would like to point out that evolution of consciousness is an extremely slow process in which translation is the *process* by which transformation eventually comes. Translation itself is part and parcel of becoming transformed, as surely as a growing rosebud is the blossoming rose in progress. They are not separate things but one and the same thing—unfolding Ati.

Merry Browne
Louisville, Kentucky

BREAKING EGO'S ADDICTION

It seems to me that the issue of how few of us really

make the shift from translation to transformation, and how little [Ken Wilber's] Integral theories have been adopted practically, in spite of how they are intellectually acclaimed, are both underpinned by a little known psychological "fact" of life which he does not explicitly mention. Briefly, that is that we 1) develop our ego/personality/lower self by experiencing ourselves as if we *are* it as we grow up. 2) Our ego/lower self is committed to maintaining itself in the manner to which it is accustomed—i.e. running the show the way it has always been. 3) Ego is absolutely adverse to change, which means that I as ego am unconsciously addicted to maintaining what has always been. 4) As long as I remain unaware that a) I am NOT my ego, and b) that my ego is sucking me into colluding with it by keeping the addiction unconscious, I will be unable to subject ego to the painful process of withdrawal from its addiction. 5) Spiritual transformation can only happen when I am no longer controlled by ego's addiction. I MUST become aware that I am not my ego, and that it's addiction is controlling me, and keeping everything the same, however much I consciously believe I'm working for transformation. I believe that recognition of this primary addiction, and the development of ways of breaking out of it, is fundamental to any truly transformative psycho-spirituality. I believe that it is a measure of the collective ego's power to protect itself that this simple "fact" remains unspoken.

Nicholas Hedley
via email

LIVE THE TRUTH

I read with interest as the editors were booted out of their job and forced to live the truth! ["A Matter of Integrity"] Amazing that Andrew would jeopardize the entire magazine for their sake, yet it is wonderful that he would do that. I wanted to see more articles from Andrew. I enjoyed so many of the introductions and interviews by him. Often his questions were as much of the interviews as the answers. It was a great issue. Thanks for a great magazine and a wonderful purpose.

Michael Petra
via email

CHANGED MY LIFE

Thanks for the *fantastic* interview with Ajja. I think it changed my life.

Thomas de Lackner
via email

A MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

I wrote previously to commend you on the latest magazine, now, I am writing to you out of deep appreciation. A most precious gift has been revealed to me. In the middle of the night, my little dog growled and I was awakened to a being who I took to be a "Jesus" figure. It was a light, and it stayed with me all night and I eventually drifted off to sleep feeling strangely comforted. When I awoke in the morning, I discovered I was truly "awake." That light continues to be with me today, and I am enlivened by its indwelling presence, surely each stage of glory is a remarkable experience. I know that light will never leave me as it is my own true presence. Gratitude is the gift of

Grace and I extend my heartfelt thanks for those who contributed the words that triggered my process. Congratulations.

Gracelynn
Canberra, Australia

A WHOLE VISION

Just a note to say *thanks* for your anniversary issue. So good I sent two gift subscriptions to friends. I do appreciate the variety of approaches that you take and the quality of the articles and interviews. Hard to single out just any one—but I did especially love the interview with Fr. Keating, ["The Heart of the Matter"] since I am from

a similar background to his. It's gratifying to know how whole his vision is. It's hard to find a Catholic author/practitioner these days who can write/respond with such global understanding and experience.

Elizabeth Croake
via email

REPRINT DISAPPOINTMENT

When I got halfway through the [issue] I realized these articles were reprinted from previous issues. It is true that there was a little subscript with a label to indicate which issue the article came from but this was so subtle as to be unhelpful. It would have been quite easy to say

ONLY THE ABSOLUTE

Your recent reprint of the original interview with Ajja by Andrew Cohen brought home the essence of what this quest is all about. Ajja's message and his manner of speaking are reminiscent of the greatest sage of the twentieth century—Sri Ramana Maharshi. It's as if the Absolute is speaking directly to us, through Ajja. I've never met him, but I think it would be safe to say, after reading his words, that he is One whose "small self" has completely disappeared; there is only the Absolute left, which, in the end, is all there is anyway.

The eminent physicist who was grilling Ajja and demanding "proof" of his state was only displaying the all too common human insistence of wanting to satisfy the mind's curiosity. The mind can never know That which is beyond the mind. No proof is required, or ever given by true masters, other than the "proof" of their life; we can only know who we truly are by direct experience, as Ajja so humbly says, when we become That which we seek, or better yet, when we finally realize we have never been other than That which we seek. Thank you for sharing your "discovery" of Ajja with the world.

Brian Haley
Vancouver



NEW BOOKS

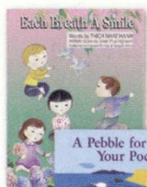
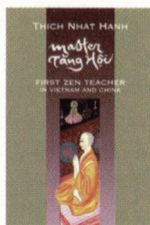
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for each article where it originally came from, either at the beginning or at the end of it, and/or to make a general statement at the beginning of the magazine.

John Rowan
London, England

OUR APOLOGY

We at WIE regret that we did not indicate more prominently that our Tenth Anniversary Issue contained our favorite selections from previous issues.

The Editors

NO CHEESECAKE FOR THE AWAKENED?

As the goal of Lee Lozowick ["Rock 'n' Roll, Crazy Wisdom, and Slavery to the Divine"] is the same as all our wise men, it is obvious he had the same experience as they did. The transforming experiences cause the recipient to work toward a world of enlightened people that would translate to a world completely free of violence and competitiveness. While peace is his goal, there is good reason to believe that he has lost his way. When he says that his followers should "do as I say, not as I do" and that "behavior has nothing to do with an enlightened state," he is dead wrong. Virtue is as much a part of the profile as is being a peacenik. Freedom, in the "awakening" sense, is being without the chains of emotion, which means there is also no temptation. In such a state of mind, a piece of fattening cheesecake would look as undesirable as a piece of wood, and so too would the siren's call, or the desire to climb the ladder of worldly success.

Joan Morrone
Sebring, Florida

MISLEADING MINISTRY

The interview with Ramesh Balsekar, *Close Encounters of the Advaita*

Kind, provides extraordinary first-hand evidence of how absurd the modern day Neo-Advaita community has become. The only thing more disturbing than the BS that flowed from RB is the fact that he "holds satsang . . . and a constant stream of almost exclusively Western seekers find their way to Bombay to see him."

Balsekar's misleading ministry is based on the idea that, "an action happens if it is God's will." What is so dastardly about this assertion is that it is true in one sense and that is what gives the claim such power. However, what Balsekar obviously has no comprehension of is that "God's Will" is not a fatalistic predetermined destiny that He heartlessly cast into some type of cosmic reinforced concrete. Balsekar rhetorically asks "What else can you do? (Other than God's will)." The implication is that there will be absolutely no difference between abiding by the laws of nature and violating them. Balsekar is not the first to preach that there is no free will and that we are no more than body/mind organisms hopelessly adrift in a cold-hearted, mechanically-programmed, indifferent world. He does attempt to prop up his concepts, with a quote from Lord Buddha, "Events happen, deeds are done . . ." but this is also deceitfully misleading. Lord Buddha never taught that we have neither the opportunity nor the responsibility to act properly. The Bhagavad Gita confirms this and does not paint the bleak and helpless situation that Balsekar describes. Instead it confirms that we do have the free will to act either harmoniously with the laws of nature or contrary to them. We are informed that one course of action will attract the Grace of God and empower us to overcome the obstacles of life,

while the other will leave us stranded alone in the quagmire of material entanglement indefinitely.

William Roberts

Ojai, California

PLANET FREEWILL

I read [Chris Parish's] article on Ramesh Balsekar and found that it sat comfortably with me.

A few months later by the grace of God I sat at this sage's feet. There was no doubt in my mind that this was a realized being. For each moment I sat there I was aware of gratitude arising, that out of five billion people on the planet I was in this tiny room with this magnificently ordinary being. His lesson is clear, it is radical and yet on my part it has led to a profound peace and acceptance of all that exists in life. I get very clearly that there is no individual doer and therefore there is no reason for pride, envy, hatred or greed. I can also see how many people would be reluctant to bid farewell to planet freewill. I thought [Chris's] article brilliant and I can see [his] head was in the tiger's mouth. [Chris,] don't take it out because the readers don't grasp what you were saying. Several did. They have sat in Ramesh's presence, and they are not looking back at all.

Susana H.

via email

JACK LALANNE ENLIGHTENED?

So, you don't believe that Jack LaLanne is enlightened? ["Isn't Life Just Great?"] Jack may not view life through the same spiritual lens, but that makes him no less (or more) open to past, present, or future enlightenment. Personally, I trust Jack . . . he says that he had an awakening, and I have no reason to doubt him, as he certainly exemplifies the bodhisattva in his efforts to use what he has learned from his

awakening to help others. And you yourself said that "lightness of being seems to be his natural state." Sounds to me like he's got it! At least Jack makes sure that he keeps "chopping wood and carrying water."

Billy Fondren

Nashville, Tennessee



Issue 19, Spring/Summer 2001

SOLDIERS OF LIGHT

I just recently finished reading your "Can Enlightenment Save the World?" issue, and I need to say that many of your interviewees did not seem to realize that changing the world is as much an energetic process as it is an intellectual or even physical enterprise. Let me explain: If I, or anyone, through doing sadhana [spiritual practice] become a little bit "purified," then whenever I interact with another, no matter what the content of this interaction, they receive some of the benefit of my sadhana. As water seeks its own level, so does spiritual energy. Those "more pure" than us uplift us and those less pure bring us down. If someone really starts to progress spiritually then without them having to say or do anything they become spiritual transformers capable of uplifting a whole area, or even the whole world, just by their presence. Hail to committed *sadhaks*! The consciousness of the world is



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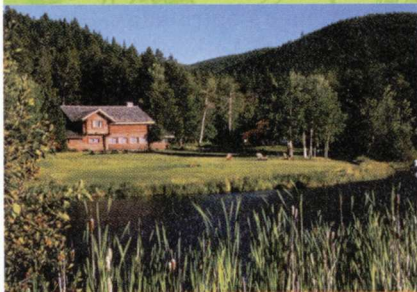
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Dean Lerner & Mary Dunn	7/13-7/20
John Schumacher & Patricia Walden	7/20-7/27
Erich Schiffmann	7/27-8/3
Judith Lasater	8/3-8/10
JJ Gormley	8/10-8/17
Cindy Lee	8/17-8/24
Lois Steinberg	8/24-8/30
Cora Wen	8/31-9/6
Theatre of the Soul - Jungian Workshop	9/7-9/14
Kausthub Desikachar	9/14-9/20

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and Linda Heron Wind
—Wakantia Gateway 7/10-7/20

Bhutan with Rodney Yee

11/1-11/17



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dense, sadhana is the spade that turns and loosens the soil to prepare it for planting.

As far as I am concerned, the inner work is the "real work," and if this is pursued diligently then the proper outer work, and the desire for it, will fall into place of its own accord. God needs soldiers of light, not a rag-tag militia of egoistic do-gooders jumping on the save-the-earth bandwagon for their own personal glorification.

Manoharan
Kerala, India

NO Gnostic CONFLICT

I have two friends and fellow Gnostics who are also in human services as I am. I told them of how well this issue helped reconcile what I formerly perceived as conflicts between being a Gnostic and being committed to helping others in need. Thanks!

Don
via email

THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON DRUGS

Great magazine! I just read my first issue today and was completely impressed with every article. Remember the old commercial: "This is your brain on drugs. . ." where they show an egg frying? That's how I felt after the first article. So much great stuff to ponder. I would also like to take my hat off to Gary Leigh whose letter was printed in the Fall/Winter issue. He says "It is now critical that our enlightened masters go beyond preaching to the already converted and start reaching out to that critical mass currently on the borderline of awakening." I hear in so many Zen and Buddhist publications that life is not about taking the easy way out. Yet so many of our so-called masters believe that old saw "to change the world, change ourselves." And that's it! And naturally this is all

done by meditation alone. Yeah right, isn't "that" the easy way out? Whatever happened to "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water; after enlightenment, chop wood, carry water"?

Marc Vinson
New Jersey

DHARMA-LITE?

I am baffled by the animus shown Jack Kornfield's new book, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*. I read the review, read the book, then re-read the review. [Issue 18, "A Call to Mediocrity"] I'm astonished that two people can read the same book (a basic, sane, simple book) and come to such very different assessments of it. I was prepared to dislike the book. I too have had enough of dharma-lite. That's not what I got from Jack's book. Jack offers encouragement along the Path. We all need such, especially those of us who live and work in places where the vast majority of our fellow citizens consider talk about Enlightenment or dharma to be part of a vast Satanic conspiracy to deceive.

Steve Smith
Gaffney, SC

THE MANY FACES OF BUDDHA

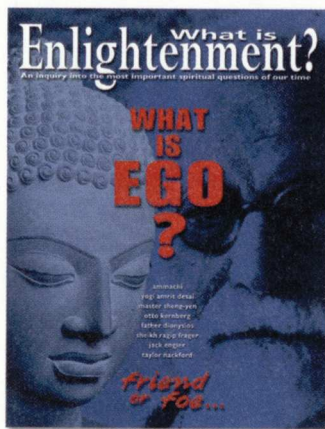
I think your ad in your WIE Extra [WIE's subscriber supplement] displaying the head of Buddha on the body of a man opening a champagne bottle is in not only extremely bad taste but is offensive to the followers of Buddhism.

Cliff Johnson
via email

I just picked up my first copy of WIE, Issue 19. My compliments for publishing some of the critical letters you have received. I respect my fellow readers who were offended by your graphic of the Buddha head on the "suit," but I disagree with them.

I may be an "irresponsible westerner," but I welcome creative expression, especially that which compels me to think. They have to admit, it made them think, too. I can identify with both of those icons, and putting them together cleverly illustrated an important internal struggle for many of us—one foot in the spiritual world and one in the secular world. Bravo!

Anna Iriks
via email



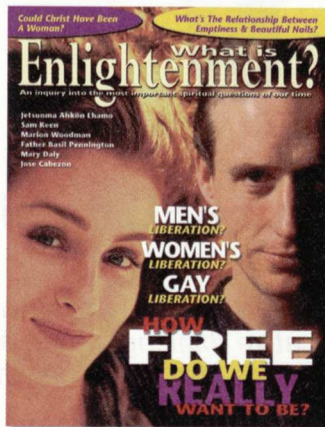
Issue 17, Spring/Summer 2000

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

I am a Roman Catholic who believes that spiritual perfection and full-realization has been achieved in the lives of a vast army of saints produced by the Church. I read Andrew Cohen's editorial "What Is Ego? A Report from the Trenches. . ." with great admiration. I particularly like the way Andrew interviews famous gurus, like Yogi Desai and follows up ambiguous answers with different versions of the original question. He is an honest interviewer, and in my opinion, gets to the heart of the matter. Andrew has the same kind of honest, penetrating spiritual understanding as that shown by the apostle Paul. It's too bad he's not a Catholic. In my opinion, Andrew Cohen is doing a real service to those seeking spiritual

enlightenment by facing up to the most difficult issues surrounding transformation: why some perfectly realized gurus, and their western disciples, turn out to be spiritual egotists, who use their positions for personal gain.

Andrew Richards
via email, Australia



Issue 16, Fall/Winter 1999

IN THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

Apropos the interview "No difference!" of Shankaracharya Krishna Bharati Tirtha by Chris Parish, I wish to offer the following comments, to present His Holiness' views in the right perspective. Some points made by the Shankaracharya (that the woman should continue to serve an evil-minded husband) are unacceptable to me, but the following should be kept in mind with regard to Hinduism. After the marriage, the husband and wife form one pair, and any dharma performed by the husband begets fruit for the wife also. The husband is forbidden to abandon his wife without support and take *sannyas* [become a monk]. He cannot take *sannyas* if the wife refuses. The Shankaracharya has emphasized that there is no difference between men and women in so far as spirituality is concerned. A mother is considered more important

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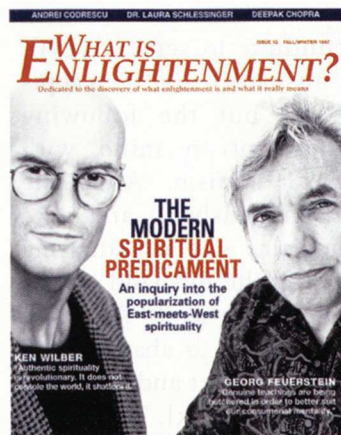
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than the father in Hindu scriptures. So much so that a Hindu *sannyas* (monk) receives salutation even from his father, but he has to bow to his mother if he meets her. In fact, the mother is the only person (besides the Guru of course) who can receive a *sannyasin's* salutation. The question on whether a Shankaracharya can be a woman is absurd! Women can form their own monasteries and might even surpass the Shankaracharyas in spiritual stature, but the Shankarite monasteries are purely male dominated and an inter-mixing of sexes in monasteries is not desirable at all. Therefore, as established by a long standing tradition and by practical considerations, women *cannot* be Shankaracharyas in the present monasteries but can certainly set up their own monasteries. I hope this absolves

the Swami of Sringeri Matha of any potential allegations of misogyny.

Vishal Agarwal
via email



Issue 12, Fall/Winter 1997

A MUCH-NEEDED APPROACH

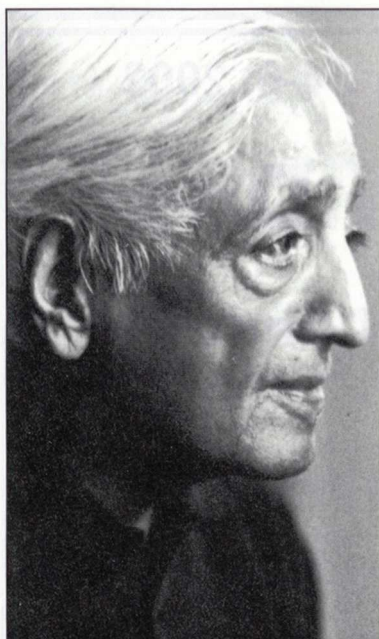
I live in France in the backwaters of a rural locality, away from the maelstrom and the clamour of opinions.

A friend of mine in Washington, DC, recently sent me a copy of Issue 12 ["The Modern Spiritual Predicament"] and I was struck by the excellence of the production. A lovely collective effort. Besides reading some of the articles over again, I leaf through the journal for the pleasure of admiring the artistry that has gone into each page. I found that the treatment of this spiritual question of what enlightenment truly is and its basic issues was bravely tackled, nicely eschewing New Age mystique—a much-needed approach.

Paula Mango
Onges, France

SO TRUE IT HURTS

"For the vast majority of seekers, spiritual experience provides merely an escape from the mundane. The call from the Absolute, the call to go



**"The understanding of the self
brings about wisdom and right
action."**

—J. Krishnamurti, *What Are You Doing with Your Life?*

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all the way, fueled by an enthusiastic willingness to give up anything in order to succeed seems to strike far too deeply into the solar plexus of many." This quotation from "Releasing the Unspeakable Glory of the Absolute" is so true it hurts. Thank you for an amazing little article, I have it pinned to my office wall. It should be considered always, daily, by both seekers and knowers. Keep up the glorious work.

Dy Lopez
via email

GOOD WORDS

I think your magazine is a brilliant message, which can unify us all in body, mind, and spirit, beyond the semantics of our individual practices.

Hilary
Samui Dharma Healing Center
Thailand

Having read several of your back issues, I must tell you that I am profoundly appreciative of your scholarly and broad inquiry into Enlightenment. At New Years, I decided I would lower my career work in order to have time to follow the calling of my heart, which is to explore the experience of Enlightenment. Your offer in the mail to subscribe synchronistically responded to my quest. It feels wonderful to be connected with like-minded scholars.

Joan P. La Montagne, Ph.D.
via email

I am an avid fan of WIE. Everyone faces the problem of suffering. Suffering is a universal malady, which requires a universal remedy, not a sectarian one. You offer such a remedy in your magazine and I revere you for what you are accomplishing.

Gilad Shimshon
Los Angeles, California


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PEACE OF MIND

For many of us, myself included, the search for enlightenment is not possible in terms of studying it and living a monastic life or even going to India. So the way I and probably others have done it is to look for articles in this vast media of ours about the subject of enlightenment. Your periodical is a very easy read in terms of its content and you and all of your contributors are excellent writers. You not only delve into what Buddhism and other religions are about, but also what they offer in terms of each of our emotional, spiritual, philosophical and human needs. What you are writing about has and is affecting me in a positive emotional and spiritual way.

Novem Smith
Portland, Oregon

WIE EXTRA

Last week I received the WIE Extra. I've read everything in it. What a great selection of articles! The excerpt from Andrew's book *An Unconditional Relationship to Life* is intriguing and beautiful. And Aurobindo's thoughts about the Perfect life are marvelous. Let me tell you, that's what Perfection is all about, no less!

Dora Rebelo
Plano, Texas

Please accept my grateful thanks for sending the Fall/Winter copy of WIE and the *Subscribers' Extra*. I read an article each day as part of my "dharma lesson"—I feel so blessed to study the spiritual teachings. This is by far the best and most comprehensive magazine I have read!

Sara Watkins
Asheville, North Carolina

from the editors



One afternoon last September, deep in an editorial discussion about the subject of this issue, our spiritual teacher suddenly remarked, "It seems that we're talking about a different kind of enlightenment."

I REMEMBER THE MOMENT clearly. One afternoon last September, deep in an editorial discussion about the subject of this issue, our spiritual teacher suddenly remarked, "It seems that we're talking about a different kind of enlightenment."

"A different kind of enlightenment?" All of us on the editorial team looked at each other, puzzled and intrigued by the unexpected idea. What could that possibly mean? Enlightenment, by traditional definition, is understood to be the realization of the timeless, the unborn, the eternal—the recognition of that which always was, always is, and always will be. How could such a realization ever change? How could there possibly be a "different" kind of enlightenment? Yet, we had to admit, the evidence was compelling. Something new was emerging in the spiritual world, a new perspective, a new vision based on a passion for evolution that definitely seemed to be changing the way we—wait a minute. Did I just say *evolution*? Hasn't the theory of evolution long been the number one *enemy* of the spirit in most religious circles? Isn't evolution the atheist's answer to religious faith, the "blind watchmaker" who has slowly fashioned life out of inanimate matter without

any Divine help, Darwin's paradigm-shattering revolution of natural selection and random mutation that explained away God with one momentous insight into the workings of Mother Nature?

Yes, that is the story as it is often told. But what is perhaps not so well known is that something critical happened on the way to Darwin's revolution. Before materialism could muscle out God and crown itself undisputed king of the natural world, its key ally—that is, the notion of evolution—was hijacked by a few forward-looking spiritual thinkers, and the world may have been forever changed. They declared that the emerging evolutionary perspective on human life was, in fact, the perfect complement to spirituality—not its enemy but its greatest friend. Indeed, they shouted to all who would listen that, taken as a whole, our new understanding of the evolutionary dynamics of the cosmos in which we live represented one of the most significant *spiritual* events in human history.

So as we began last fall to take a closer look at the new visions that have arisen from the intersecting worlds of evolution and spirituality, the possibility that we were witnessing the birth of "a different kind of enlightenment" began to take on very real dimensions. And it was a possibility that had implications that were, for us, not merely theoretical. Indeed, in the collective spiritual life of our own community of practitioners, we had recently experienced the

emergence of an intense spiritual power that had lifted everyone who was present into a radically different state of consciousness. It was a collective, volcanic surge of spiritual passion and potential that carried with it an overwhelming sense of evolutionary urgency. While it could hardly have been called "enlightenment" in the traditional sense, it contained the freedom, bliss, and release we normally associate with that term. Could this event, we wondered, have something to do with the emerging evolutionary spirituality that is capturing the attention of more and more in today's spiritual world?

For answers to this question, and others regarding our evolutionary future, the first place we began to look was in the past. Some contemporary thinkers, such as Ken Wilber and Michael Murphy, trace the beginnings of evolutionary spirituality back to the late eighteenth century, when the German idealists such as Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling began speaking about human history as the greater and greater unfolding of spirit in this world. Inspired by the burgeoning Industrial Revolution, the notion of progress was then all the rage in the West, a notion that would, over the next few decades, provide the underpinnings for the development of evolutionary theory and be applied, by Darwin and others, to much more than cultural history. And when a few courageous thinkers started exploring the connections between evolution and spirituality toward the end of the 1800s, sparks began to fly. But it

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wasn't until the early twentieth century that things really exploded. It was then, in the pioneering work of India's great philosopher-sage Sri Aurobindo and the inspired writings of Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, that a new evolutionary vision was born, a vision that saw a spiritual unfolding in the natural processes of cosmic evolution. And perhaps even more importantly, both of these great men perceived a powerful evolutionary impulse at work in nature that was none other than the God principle itself surging upwards, urging us on to ever-greater heights of consciousness. Indeed, writing with the passion and conviction of those who have glimpsed a glorious future and feel its urgency in the present, they turned traditional ideas of the religious life on their head and called for a new spirituality. Adopting those long-neglected orphans of enlightenment's past — time, progress, change — they saw the true purpose of spiritual life not as the transcendence of the world nor even the compassionate embrace of the world but as the further evolution of consciousness on earth.

So for this issue of *WIE*, we set out to explore the impact that the evolution revolution is having on the world of the spirit, one that may ultimately prove to be even more profound than the impact that it has already had on the world of science. Indeed, though the contributors in the following pages hail from very different philosophical backgrounds, they have all been intellectually and spiritually captivated by the notion of evolution. And they are, each in their own way, from their own perspective, and within their own field, asking us to consider some bold, surprising, and awe-inspiring visions of spiritual enlightenment and the future of God. ■

—Carter Phipps



HERE
NOW!

What is enlightenment for the twenty-first century? Profoundly conscious and deeply passionate egoless participation in the life-process, ever free from attachment, always resting in Being.

introduction to this issue by Andrew Cohen

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A VERY CONTROVERSIAL SPIRITUAL TEACHER. WHY? *Because I tell people there is something to do!* I have always told my audiences, seekers who have come to me to hear the good news about liberation here and now, that if they want to be free, then there is a *lot* to do. And in certain circles these days, any talk of *doing* is equivalent to blasphemy. Enlightenment is supposed to be about *Being*, not doing! "Wake up!" teachers of enlightenment proclaim. "You are lost in the stream of time and becoming, convinced there is a self who is doing this and doing that. That is the very problem. Wake up and realize there is only Being—not only is there no doer, but there is also nothing to do except to realize this simple yet absolute truth. Rest in Being forever and be free."

But they're lost in the past—the *ancient* past. Ever since the end of the tired old sixties, when hundreds of thousands of us found out about enlightenment, we've been hearing the same relentless refrain: Be Here Now,

Be Here Now, Be Here NOW! *Just BE. God IS*—don't you get it? Okay—so some of us did get it . . . and then what? Oh yeah, I remember—just BE. Okay . . . I'm back—I'm Being . . . All I have to do is stay here and rest and make sure I don't think too much or worry about the past or the future, and if I'm lucky, well, maybe I could just Be some more. But wait a minute! I've been doing this for years and years, and why is it that part of me is starting to feel suffocated by all this Being, Being, Being? Oh yeah. It must be my ego rising up again, wanting to steal the show. *Rest in Being, rest in Being, rest in Being.* But wait a minute! It's *not* just my ego, that nasty, narcissistic self-(small 's')absorbed bastard. There really *does* seem to be another part of me that is here in this world and that strives not only to Be (which we all already are anyway, right? That's the enlightened state) but to *do*, to CONSCIOUSLY PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE-PROCESS, to *actively* contribute. That's the truth *too*, isn't it?

First there was Nothing (Being), then there was Something (Becoming). Who and what we are is both of these things—Being *and* Becoming, something *and* nothing, manifest *and* unmanifest, form *and* emptiness, human *and* God. Right? Isn't that the

whole picture? I mean, without the manifest universe, of which this crazy world is a part, without any doing or becoming, just Unmanifest Being would be pretty boring, wouldn't it? Not much action or life around. Resting only in the Unborn, in *nirvana*, it would be kind of quiet. Maybe too quiet, with nobody but our own Self to talk to . . . about what? Well, nothing . . . because nothing happened to talk about. That's why we Became, to ENLIVEN our own Self. That's why we got off our rear ends, so we could actively participate in our own Becoming. Becoming what? Becoming the whole Universe! But, oops . . . then we forgot who we were, forgot our roots, so to speak. We got lost in Becoming. We forgot that we were always already free, perfect, whole, and complete. We got lost in the show. And so then we began the search for our Self. And then we found it (*be here now* . . . remember?) but then in that finding, we also seemed to forget that we were never separate from the universe, from the stream of time, from Becoming, from the world. We are *that* also, fully and completely. We are *all* of that, and yet we're also *free* from all of that. Too many of us who got bitten by the enlightenment bug (back in the ancient past) forgot that we *are* the



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world as much as we are free from it. We are creating the world because we are not separate from the Creator or the creative process.

So what does enlightenment mean for *today*? What is enlightenment for the twenty-first century? It is *Evolutionary Enlightenment*! Be here now? Of course, but also, *DO* here now. Realize your own inherently free unmanifest Self as the ground of Being *and*, at the same time, recognize your own incarnation as the ceaselessly evolving body of the changing universe — a universe becoming ever more and more conscious of itself as Being *and* Becoming. What is enlightenment for the twenty-first century? Profoundly conscious and deeply passionate egoless participation in the life-process, ever free from attachment, always resting in Being.

So what's new about all this? Well, the *evolutionary* part, to be precise. In the old days, enlightenment was only about *Being* in the moment, free from attachment. At times we were told to embrace the world of doing, but only in order to use it to achieve our own liberation. But evolutionary enlightenment calls for egoless participation in the life-process for the sake of the evolution of consciousness itself. We are all desperately needed right now. For what? To truly awaken, to become enlightened, so that we can consciously participate, *as liberated souls*, in the life-process. What is the point of the experience of incarnation? To finally be able to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the life-process — to *EVOLUTION* — to *conscious* evolution, so that we can make a *real* difference in this crazy, divided, suffering world. Yes, enlightenment for the twenty-first century calls us *all* to participate wholeheartedly — that means *with everything* we've got — for everyone else's sake, for the upliftment of all of life, *RIGHT NOW*, as *liberated* beings. Yes, we are all needed, by our very own Self. *Desperately*. ■

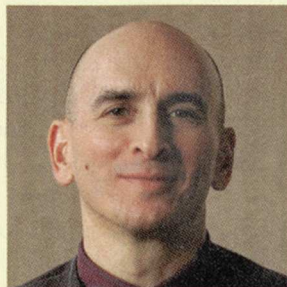
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Samiel Bonder



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EVOLUTIONARY **ENLIGHTENMENT** *THE IDEALISTS*



THE FUTURE OF
GOD
1

Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber

The Evolution of Enlightenment

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A Song That Goes On Singing

An Interview with Dr. Beatrice Bruteau

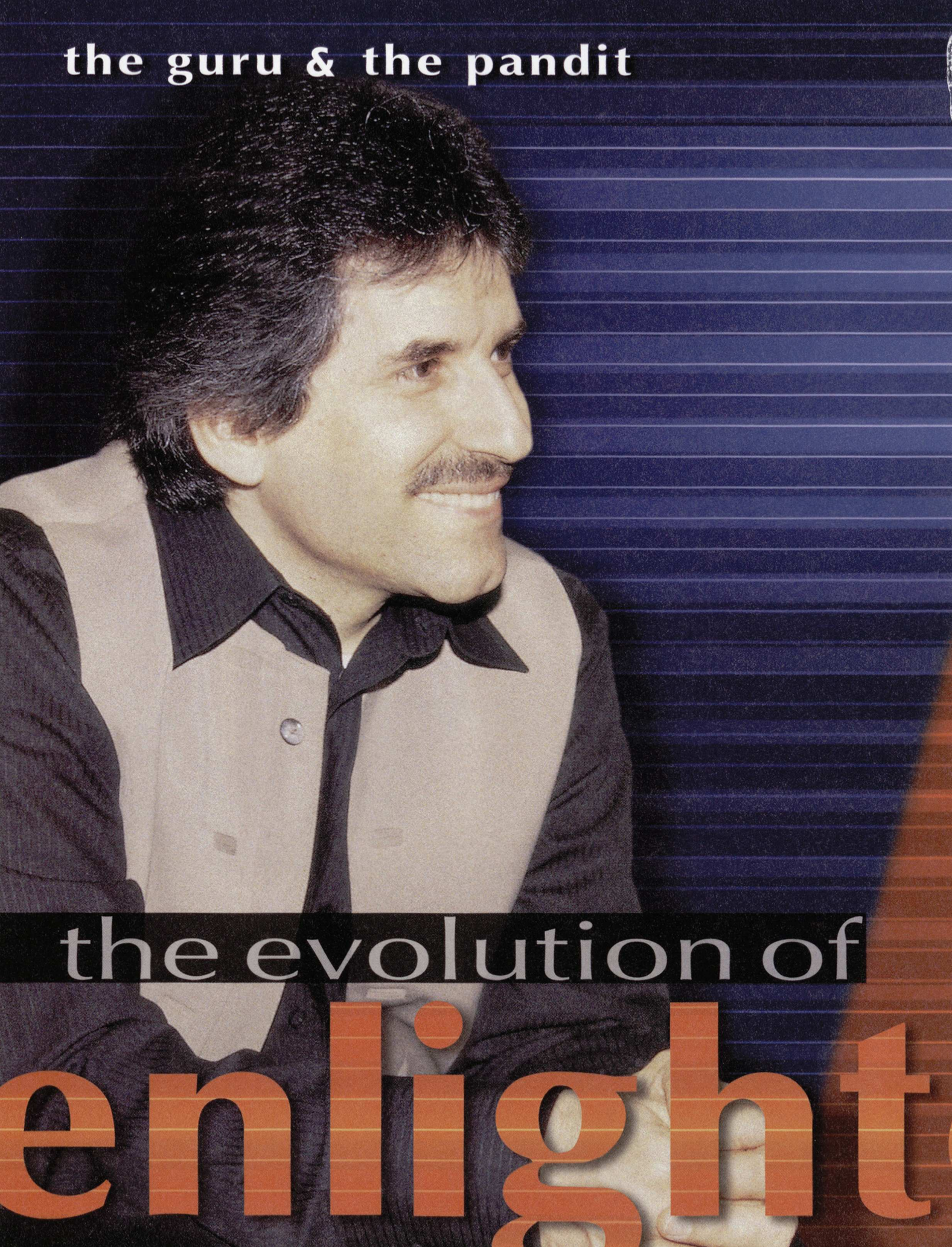
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Swami Vivekananda

On Darwin, Evolution, and the Perfect Man


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the guru & the pandit



the evolution of
enlight

andrew cohen & ken wilber in dialogue



IN THIS NEW WIE feature, Andrew Cohen, spiritual teacher and founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* and Ken Wilber, the world's most renowned integral philosopher, join together, *guru* and *pandit*, heart to heart and mind to mind, to push the limits of their (and our) experience and understanding and to chart the emerging edge of a wholly contemporary spirituality. Now, the word *pandit* isn't just a strange spelling of pundit—those often caustic, overly

enmment

intellectual, wise-cracking critics who pepper the airwaves. A true *pandit* is a scholar—not someone just wasting away in an Ivory Tower, but one who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom. So, we're calling upon the ancient Sanskrit meaning of *pandit* and, for that matter, *guru*, as the starting point for an interaction that has the potential to transcend and include (to use a distinctly Wilberian expression) the old, and propel us into something radically new.

So while we're reclaiming and transcending ancient spiritual terms, let's take a fresh look at *guru*—which in Sanskrit literally means “dispeller of darkness,” one who teaches spiritual liberation from his or her own direct experience or realization. In the ever-changing and deepening inquiry of WIE, Andrew Cohen has sought

to bring to light the meaning and significance of enlightenment for our time through the thoroughly modern medium of the magazine. And Andrew, as not all of our readers may be aware, has fought the tide of anti-authority sentiment in the postmodern world by embracing the traditional demands of the guru principle and championing the student-teacher relationship as a radical partnership for human evolution. Fiercely independent, Andrew is forging out of his experience a new spirituality—what he calls “evolutionary enlightenment”—arising from the mystical depth known to the Eastern enlightenment traditions and empowered by a Western passion for humanity's individual and collective evolutionary potential.

Ken Wilber often says, “I am a *pandit*, not

a guru.” His soaring and searing words have graced our pages before, bringing a true *pandit*'s wisdom to ignite our hearts and sharpen our minds, compelling us to think deeply about the whole of human life and inspiring us to reach for greater depth and higher potential. By Ken's own definition, “A *pandit* is a spiritual practitioner who also has a flair for the academic or scholarly or intellectual and so becomes a teacher of the Divine, an articulator and defender of the dharma, an intellectual samurai.” A true warrior of the word, he has written more than eighteen volumes (and been translated into more than twenty languages), articulating his constantly evolving “theory of everything.” At a time when postmodern fragmentation and relativism bring the contemporary academy perilously close to the

edge of nihilism, Ken's independent voice cries for an integral, whole-some, and deeply spiritual synthesis of Eastern models of transcendence and Western philosophy and developmental psychology.

What would happen, we wondered, when these two uncompromising and fearless idealists met to discuss the future of God? What happened, as you will see, is a thrilling example of the alchemy that can take place in the openness of true dialogue. In this debut of a feature that will appear regularly in our pages over the months and years to come, Andrew and Ken, third millennium *guru* and twenty-first-century *pandit*, at the edge of past and future, ride the swift currents of a rising spiritual tide—exploring the evolution of enlightenment itself.

—Elizabeth Debold

the evolution of enlightenment

ANDREW COHEN: *I was never especially interested in evolution. Initially, after my awakening in 1986, I was teaching in the same way that I had been taught by my teacher. This was my experience: that everything simply was as it was. There was nowhere to go and there was nothing to do. The whole point, in that teaching, was just to realize that. It was the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. In fact, at the time I was so sure about this view that I seriously*

questioned the authenticity of any teaching of enlightenment that implied time, future, or becoming, and also of any teacher who was telling anybody to do anything that implied time, future, or becoming.

After some time, however, I started to notice that in spite of the fact that many of my students were having very powerful awakening experiences, in most cases, they would still at times become lost in narcissism, greed, and neurotic

self-obsession—lost in deeply conditioned and small-minded impulses. So I began to put more and more of my attention on the need for the human being to actually transform. To transform him- or herself in order to become a living expression of the emptiness and purity of motive that one discovers in the spiritual experience. So gradually, over a period of time, I began to put a greater emphasis on cultivating the ability to embody and manifest that beauty, perfection, and wholeness as our humanity than on experiencing the bliss of pure Being alone.



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Indeed, in surrendering
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and a passion to
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and the whole universe
for a cause that has nothing
to do with oneself.

So that was the beginning. Then, after a few years, something new started to emerge in my teaching. And the first time I became aware of it was when I started to teach retreats in India. One morning, as I was giving a talk, something just exploded out of me. I didn't know where it came from. An unbridled passion poured out of me spontaneously, calling for this miracle, this mystery beyond time, to become manifest in this very world as ourselves. It shocked and inspired many people, and it shocked and inspired me as well. That was over ten years ago.

And more and more, over time, it has started to dawn on me that this passion is really a passion for more than just enlightenment in the traditional sense or the Eastern sense, which would mean a vertical lift-off, getting off the wheel of becoming, transcending this world absolutely, and leaving no trace. My emphasis has shifted radically. The goal now, as audacious as it sounds, is not merely to transcend the world but to transform the world, to become an agent of the evolutionary impulse itself. Indeed, in surrendering one's ego to that, one literally feels oneself being filled up

with a divine and luminous energy and a passion to transform the world and the whole universe for a cause that has nothing to do with oneself.

This shift of emphasis, many years ago, was also one of the reasons that I parted ways with my teacher. Whenever he would hear me speaking about there being anything to do except get off the wheel of becoming and BE, he felt that I was corrupting and distorting his teaching. So at a certain point I started to conclude that there must be different kinds of enlightenment, different kinds of awakening that actually have different results.

Eventually, I started to call this teaching “evolutionary enlightenment” or “impersonal evolutionary enlightenment.” In this teaching, there is an emphasis not only on the realization of emptiness and pure Being but also on the need to become a radically and profoundly transformed human being who is going to be able to manifest our higher evolutionary potential in the world. I’d never really come across anything like this before. It was only recently, when I came upon the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin in our research for the magazine, that I started to hear echoes of my own passion—a passion for evolutionary enlightenment, for awakening to the truth of who we are, and then daring to allow ourselves to experience the urgency to make it manifest in this world with all of our being.

So what I wanted to speak to you about first was this whole question of what enlightenment ultimately is. I think it’s an important question because many, many people are interested in spiritual matters these days. And I think, interestingly enough, that the traditional definition of enlightenment may not actually be able to meet the needs of the evolving world in the time in which we are living.

KEN WILBER: I basically agree with everything you said and I would obviously have just a few different perspectives on it. You went through a number of very important concepts. Maybe we could start with the one you mentioned last, which was different types of enlightenment. At first that sounds kind of funny because enlightenment ostensibly is all-inclusive, timeless, all-embracing, unchanging, eternal, and so on. So it’s hard to imagine having two different types of any of those things. But in fact, even in the traditions, you find at least two major, very different conceptions

of enlightenment. One was prevalent during the Axial period, starting at around 2000 B.C.E. up until roughly 100 A.D. And that was probably best expressed in the early Buddhist tradition, the Theravadan tradition, in the concept of *nirvana* or *nirvikalpa*, which basically means immersion in a formless realm, where there is no manifestation and no objects are arising. It is a state of consciousness utterly free of change, utterly free of time and space and self and turmoil. The classic analogy, for those who haven’t had that experience, is that it’s something like deep, dreamless sleep. You enter a state of formless consciousness. That state of *nirvana* was held to be the highest state of realization and was thought to be completely divorced from *samsara*. The world of emptiness was completely divorced from the world of form. Emptiness was transcendent and timeless; form was temporal—suffering, pain, illusion, and so on. And the goal, no question, was to get out of *samsara*, “off the wheel,” and into *nirvana*.

I think the real revolution in spirituality occurred about that time, starting particularly with the genius Nagarjuna in the East and Plotinus in the West. That was the breakthrough to what could be called nondual enlightenment or the nondual realization, which is a profound understanding of *nirvana*, or emptiness or the timeless or the transcendent, but it’s also a union because it’s a realization wedded with the entire world of form, with the world of *samsara*. So the whole notion of the nondual traditions was not that you got into a state that was formless, unmanifest cessation, but that that formlessness or that emptiness was one with all forms that were arising moment to moment. And that nondual state, or *sahaj*, was, in a sense, both the basis of the bodhisattva vow and the beginning

of the tantric traditions. The idea was that somehow the world of *samsara* and the world of *nirvana* had to go hand in hand or you didn’t really have a full, complete, or, if you will, integral being.

So on the one hand, it’s still true that the *dharmakaya* or emptiness or the perfectly formless realm doesn’t enter the stream of time. But on the other hand, that’s only half the picture. The other half is that there is a stream of time, there is development, there is unfolding, there is evolution, there is transformation. And the real key to this discussion, I think, is when you understand that the only way you can permanently and fully realize emptiness is if you transform, evolve, or develop your vehicle in the world of form. The vehicles that are going to realize emptiness have to be up to the task. That means they have to be developed; they have to be transformed and aligned with spiritual realization. That means that the transcendent and the immanent have to, in a sense, flavor each other.

AC: In the vehicle?

KW: Exactly.

AC: So you’re saying that the vehicle has to become perfected.

KW: Yes. Sometimes what happens is that people get kind of dunked into emptiness. They have a radical realization of this infinite, boundless consciousness that they are. And then, as you were describing, the realization fades. They’re back in the same egoic vehicle. They’re the same contracted self, and they don’t know what happened. But they don’t want to get involved in actual practice or transformative endeavors that would make their vehicle capable of holding that realization in a fuller, more enduring

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in the world of form,

not in the world of emptiness.

But that means that evolution
is half of the equation.

And so unless

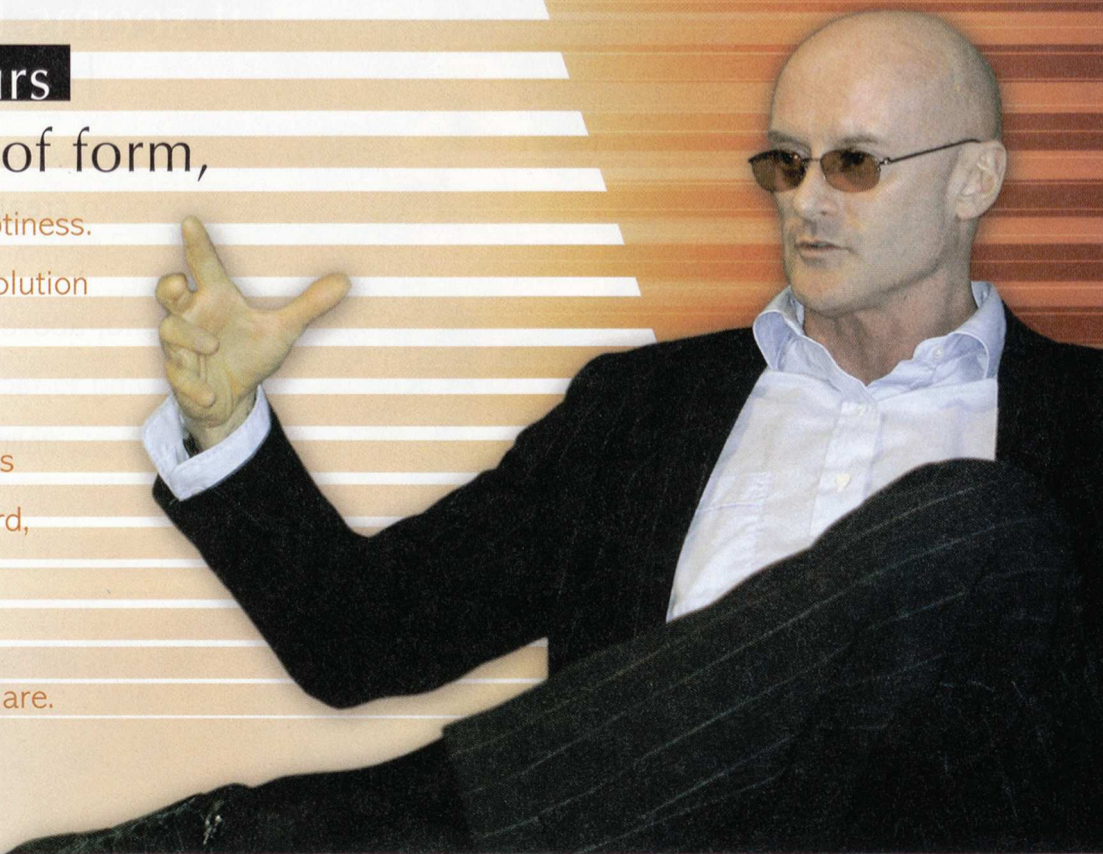
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fashion. So that's unfortunate because then, as you say, they are cutting themselves off from the world of time, from getting involved in that world, and from what's necessary to do in order to become a transparent vehicle of the timeless.

The best of a nondual or integral realization is that we have to basically work on both. We have to polish our capacity, in a sense, to fully realize emptiness, moment to moment. But it's the emptiness of all forms arising moment to moment. So we have to have a radical embrace of the world of *samsara* as the vehicle and expression of *nirvana* itself. Unfortunately, I think you're also right that a lot of the nondual schools don't live up to it.

People tend to err on one side or the other of the equation. They either immerse themselves in *samsara* or the sensory-motor domain—nature is spirit, any manifest object

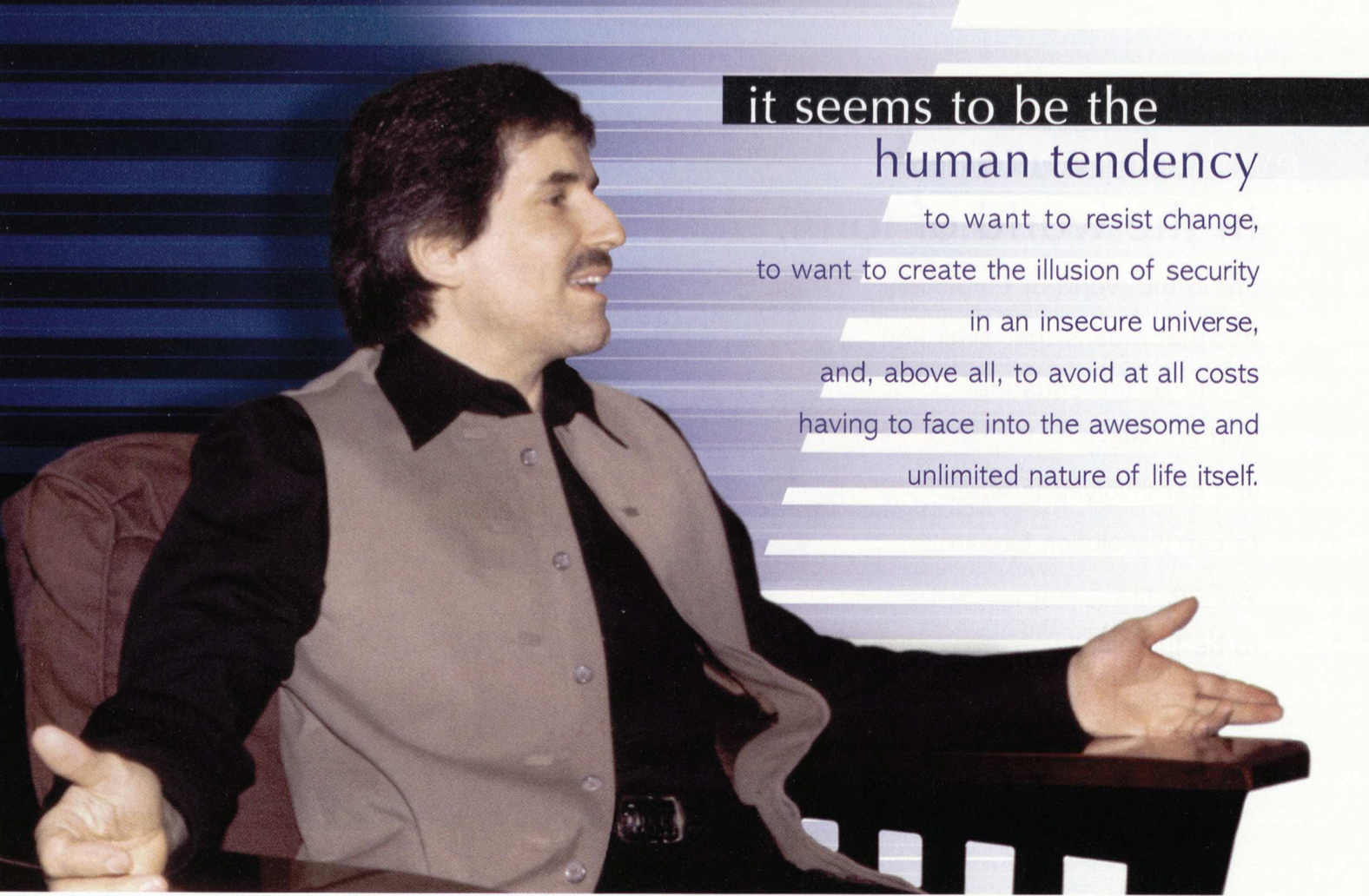
is taken to be spirit, and so on—or they get immersed in the formless realm of cessation. And I think what we are interested in, certainly what you and I are talking about, is a realization that encompasses both emptiness *and* form. And let me just add, evolution occurs in the world of form, not in the world of emptiness. But that means that evolution is half of the equation. And so unless you get involved in ways to carry evolution forward, you are not going to be fully realizing the emptiness that you are.

AC: That's great. Now I want to pursue this further. Because in your description of the nondual view where this distinction between *nirvana* and *samsara* disappears, in that interpretation of enlightenment, at least as far as I can see, the idea is still to be released from this world—basically, to get the heck out of here.

KW: I understand that.

AC: Okay, so I'm approaching the question of what enlightenment is in relationship to the world of time and becoming. And what I'm trying to isolate here is what I call "the evolutionary impulse." As I described before, it's a mysterious ecstatic compulsion to transform the world. Now, this compulsion is different, I believe, from what is traditionally spoken about in the bodhisattva vow, because at least my understanding of the bodhisattva vow is that one wants to stick around long enough to liberate all sentient beings from this world. In other words, to help them get the heck out of here. But in the ecstatic evolutionary impulse that I'm talking about, liberation is actually found through surrendering to this imperative to evolve in the world.

KW: Not getting out of it.



it seems to be the human tendency

to want to resist change,
to want to create the illusion of security
in an insecure universe,
and, above all, to avoid at all costs
having to face into the awesome and
unlimited nature of life itself.

AC: Right. In this interpretation of enlightenment, all of one's consciousness and energy is used in the service of creation itself—beyond ego. In other words, one's vehicle is to be used for this great and all-demanding purpose. And one's enlightenment, one's ongoing daily ecstatic liberation, would be found and directly, consciously experienced through utter and perfect surrender to that purpose alone. So at least in the ideal case, if such a thing is possible, there would be no egoic motive left and one would be constantly burning up for a cause that one could grasp only partially, shall we say, because its culmination always exists in the future.

KW: Okay, yes, I agree with the general thrust of what you are saying. Let me reframe it in this way. As I said before, there was a major shift from the early Axial religions,

which emphasized mere ascent, mere transcendence, mere cessation. That shift—to the nondual traditions—was epochal because it was no longer emptiness divorced from form, but a realization that *emptiness is not other than form, form is not other than emptiness*, as the Heart Sutra puts it. Now that shift, which led to Mahayana and eventually Vajrayana Buddhism, was important because it signaled a profound understanding that was different from the previous main types of religion that we saw. The earliest of these held that the world of *samsara* is spirit. That's basically the immersion in mere manifestation or mere nature. And then came the Axial period, which said, "No, the transcendent is the only spiritual reality—the merely ascending, merely timeless is the only thing that's real." And the nondual said, "Wait a minute, you're

both right. And what we have to do is work out a way to do that."

Now, the original bodhisattva vow was, "I vow to gain enlightenment as quickly as possible for the benefit of all others," because, as Kalu Rinpoche used to point out, "If you put off your enlightenment, how can you save anybody, you idiot?" That matured into the tantric view and what both of them had in common, at least implicitly, was the notion that *nirvana* and *samsara*, emptiness and form, the timeless and the world of time, being and becoming, were both parts of an integral realization. And both of those parts have to be embraced. Now, I think you're right that, in a certain sense, the traditions have not always lived up to that. And also, I think there's another meaning or a deepening understanding of nondual realization as involving an

evolutionary impulse in the world of evolving form.

AC: Yes, that's what I'm talking about!

KW: And I think the reason that that's the case can be found in just what we've been saying: A sage, let's say a thousand years ago, could have a profound realization of *dharmakaya* or pure emptiness—a profound realization of *nirvikalpa samadhi*—and then also have a profound realization of a union with all form. So this sage would have a realization of both emptiness and the world of form and would realize that they are intrinsically each other. They arise moment to moment as the emptiness of all forms that are arising ecstatically. Now, nonetheless, that almost perfectly enlightened sage, in the *sahaj* sense, the nondual sense, can still only be one with the world of form that is present at his or her time. And that world of form is not going to have the types of knowledge that we now have about the world of form.

AC: You mean about evolution?

KW: About evolution in particular—the exact nature of it, what it actually means, what is going on in the world of form. In the world of form, we are seeing an unmistakable drift toward increasing levels of differentiation and integration and complexity and unification. And that's a profound understanding because it means that our vehicle in the world of form is becoming more transparent to the processes that are in the world of form. That changes everything. It doesn't matter how deeply enlightened somebody was a thousand years ago, the world of form did not include that understanding. So that wasn't part of their realization, even though their realization of emptiness was exactly as great as ours can

be today because emptiness is emptiness, it doesn't change, it has no moving parts, and so on. So we're not taking anything away from the sage who lived a thousand years ago. We have one thing on that sage, however—we're alive now. And a thousand years from now, people will look back at our world of form and laugh hysterically over what idiots we were. But in the meantime, we have to get on with embodying this world of form with radical emptiness, and the result is, yes, a type of evolutionary emptiness. Or "evolutionary enlightenment," sure.

AC: And in this evolutionary enlightenment, the significant element, as I understand it anyway, is the surrender to the movement of an awakened compulsion to participate wholeheartedly in the evolutionary process for the sake of evolution itself. That's what evolutionary enlightenment is all about, not merely the attainment of one's personal liberation from or transcendence of this world.

KW: Yes, I agree.

AC: And it's that shift in emphasis that I'm really pointing to—that's what's significant, I think, in terms of ultimately how to define enlightenment for our time. Because as more and more people do become interested in what enlightenment is and what it means, I would say ninety percent of the time at least, if not more, all they hear about is transcendence, personal transcendence. And while that is usually accompanied by a plea for selflessness and compassion, it's rarely, if ever, the unbridled revolutionary passion for the total transformation of the world that surges up from the spiritual heart when it is truly liberated from the world. I mean, more often than not it's a kind of tepid, strange brew—ancient concepts of enlightenment all mixed up with

"new age" emotionally based ideas about compassion—and the fire of liberation itself is definitely not where it's coming from.

KW: We still have a very strange mixture of these three basic spiritual orientations that are available. One is pagan immersion in *samsara*. One is idealistic, transcendental escape into the world of unmanifest cessation. And one is some form of nondual that embraces them both. And the form of nondual realization in today's world is, of necessity, evolutionary nonduality. People sometimes get put off by the notion of evolution. Either they think, "Well, all this stages crap, I don't believe that—that's ranking, that's marginalizing. I don't like that." Or, if they are on the spiritual side, they think what your teacher thought, which is that any discussion of the world of time shows that you haven't really grasped Being, or grasped the timeless. So in a strange way, your own nondual realization is taken to be a lesser realization than one of these fractured states.

AC: Oh, definitely.

KW: Which is really bizarre! But in any event, it's understandable that people get a little bit put off by the notion of stages or evolutionary unfolding, or things having to get higher and higher.

AC: Because, God forbid, maybe they have further to go, maybe there's something to do here!

KW: Now of course, I would never say something nasty like that. But yes, that certainly is one of the reasons that people are put off by it. However, when we really get into a fine-tuned discussion of what the difference is between states of consciousness and stages of consciousness, I think

we can get a better handle on some of these issues.

AC: *Is that because, as you say, gradual evolution to higher stages of consciousness development is essential in order to be able to sustain and accurately interpret the experience of higher states of consciousness?*

KW: Yes, exactly. One of the reasons that people do have trouble with stages or evolutionary unfolding is that they have, themselves, experienced very profound states of consciousness that sometimes are of a nondual nature. And so they are distrustful of the notion that you have to somehow evolutionarily progress through stages in order to have access to the nondual. But that's not what we're saying. The nondual or pure emptiness itself is the ever-present state of every single stage of development. It's completely present in atoms, carrots, dogs, infants, adults, you name it. Even very young children can have a temporary altered state of a subtle, causal, or nondual nature, for the simple reason that all human beings wake, dream, have deep sleep. You see, the three great states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, sleeping) correspond with the three great realms of being (gross, subtle, causal). In the waking state you are aware of the gross realm, while dreaming you are aware of the subtle, and in deep sleep you are aware of the causal. The nondual is that ever-present witness that is there throughout *all* changing states. So all human beings have gross, subtle, and causal states available to them twenty-four hours a day, and there is the nondual, ever-present ground, which is also present to them twenty-four hours a day. So anybody at any stage of development can have an altered state of gross, subtle, causal, or nondual

realities. But in order for those temporary states to become permanent traits, you have to evolve through the stages of purifying the vehicle, in the realm of form, so that it can ecstatically, permanently, continuously embrace these higher states.

AC: *That's where people have the problem. Because as you eloquently pointed out in Boomeritis, the ego, the narcissistic self, wants to be left alone, violently wants to be left alone, and aggressively resists the idea of not already being perfect and of having to change.*

KW: Exactly. And the simple answer to those people is, "That's fine. If you really think you're already enlightened, I'm happy for you. If you don't want to go through evolutionary transformations to perfect your vehicle because you are already ecstatically one with the divine twenty-four hours a day, I'm happy for you. But if you're not that, get with the picture!"

AC: *And you would agree that with the purification of the vehicle, there would be a gradual emergence of, shall we say, a profound sense of obligation or an ecstatic compulsion to give all of our heart and energy to the evolutionary process so that the liberated glory of our own absolute nature will emerge as ourselves, in this world.*

KW: Absolutely. It can be said very simply; obviously it's very hard to embody. But the basic rule is: *resting as emptiness, embrace the entire world of form.* And the world of form is unfolding. It is evolving. It is developing. And therefore resting as blissful emptiness, you ecstatically embrace and push against the world of form as a duty.

AC: *Right, push against it. That's the important part.*

KW: Yes, absolutely.

AC: *Because in relationship to the question of what enlightenment means, the notion of pushing against the world of form, or the inertia of the world, in order to enlighten it is something a lot of people find challenging and even antithetical to what "spirituality" is supposed to be all about.*

KW: Again, I can understand some of the hesitations and problems with it. But I think we just need to take a much more considered look at the evidence. Look at the various types of states we have available to us, and particularly look at the past thirty years, when so many experiments have been made by this generation in terms of various paths and practices, and see what the actual results are. I think we're getting to a point now where we realize that a kind of integral practice—a practice that emphasizes both the immanence of spirit in terms of present manifestation and, simultaneously, the transcendent nature of spirit—is necessary. One that is, in some sense, their mysterious union—the nondual. And it is mysterious—it's a love affair. It's a love affair between Shiva and Shakti. Like all love affairs, you'll never figure it out, but your heart is plunged in the mystery of it. The mystery is that you are radically the only thing that exists in the entire universe and yet all these forms are arising within you. And in a sense, the denser forms are just your slow left foot. But you have to push against your own density in the manifest world in order to penetrate it with the awareness that you eternally are. It's that "pushing against" part—if people can't really engage with that, then I'm afraid they do just get caught in states of mere quietude or

the Vajrayana, for example,
is a wonderfully complete system—
for feudal Tibet.

Their realization of emptiness

is probably unsurpassed.

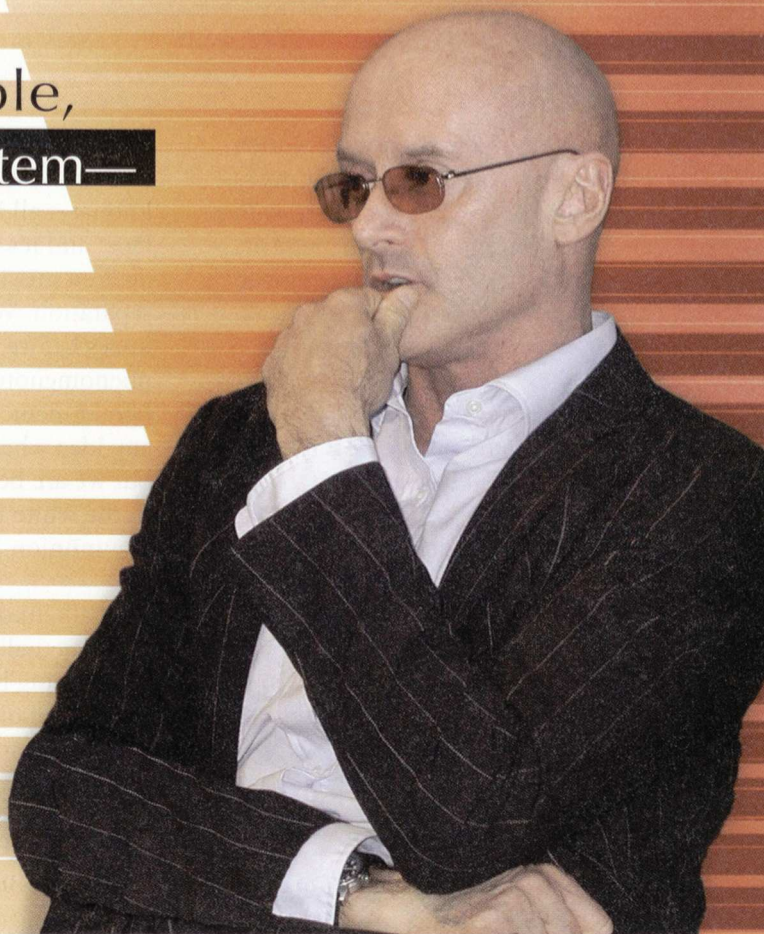
But the world of form has changed.

And you either get on that train—

the spirit's evolutionary train—or

you become that which

prevents evolution.



cessation, or mere immersion in sensory manifestation.

AC: Don't you think that's ultimately why we're here—to liberate ourselves from a merely relative identity, and any binding attachment to an unenlightened perspective, so that we can engage with the life process as perfectly as we're able to?

KW: Exactly, I agree entirely, and, as you know, the only expression that we individually have is through this particular individual vehicle that we have. Which is why you want to polish that sucker up!

AC: That's true—and the exciting part is, as I often tell people, that once one realizes this, there is an ecstatic revelation. One discovers that being exactly who one already is—not only as the timeless, unborn self but also as an incarnated, individuated

personality with whatever historical and cultural background one has—is the perfect vehicle for that total engagement. And in that recognition one experiences an ecstatic release from all the old neurotic self-concern.

KW: I think that's exactly right. One of the reasons that some spiritual teachers seem perhaps not to understand what it means to push against the world is that that pushing comes on the other side of the great release. There is already that radical freedom with the realization of the emptiness that is pervading all form. So you're not pushing against the world out of a sense of lack; you're pushing against the world out of a sense of duty.

AC: Exactly! And ecstasy and love and compulsion.

KW: Absolutely. They would think

that if somebody says the kind of thing you've been saying, then you are coming out of a state of lack, you haven't quite realized—

AC: —or maybe I'm not accepting things enough the way they are—maybe I have some kind of personal agenda.

KW: Or maybe they have not yet pushed through radically to incarnational nonduality.

AC: Incarnational nonduality—that's it. That's exactly what evolutionary enlightenment is all about!

KW: When it comes down to actual practice, and you know this as well as anybody, it's not a kind of "one-step, two-step" affair. In reality, it's a very messy, sloppy business. Sometimes you're dunked into pagan immersion in *samsara*; sometimes you're whisked into transcendental

Theravadan nonexistence. And then other times you miraculously, mysteriously find your cells in love with emptiness and form simultaneously. Whether you develop on the way up or on the way down, so to speak, either way is fine.

AC: *As long as one does. And you're right, the ecstatic emergence is a messy and often painful business.*

KW: Yes, very much so.

AC: *That's what even material evolution, organic evolution is like, you know. It's all very messy, and so is spiritual evolution. Even though it's ultimately an ecstatic event.*

KW: Exactly.

AC: *There is one other aspect to all of this that I wanted to go into. Several months ago, an extraordinary event occurred a number of times among a group of my students. They witnessed and directly experienced the spontaneous descent of a cosmic power—a powerful conscious presence within and without that was instantly enlightening. In other words, each individual experienced, in their own consciousness, inherent liberation and the unlimited potential that the liberated heart and mind feels as the living universe calls for our unconditional participation in the process of its own unfolding. These are excerpts from some of the letters they wrote to me describing the event.*

“Last night we literally reached a critical mass and exploded. Revelation after revelation as a living understanding of the sweetest perfection is being unraveled in front of our eyes.

The emerging presence is a mystery that can never be known—all it recognizes is One, and it's on a seek-and-destroy mission against all separation. We were on our knees before this miraculous phenomenon: impersonal enlightenment. None of us has any idea where we are going, but we are being consumed in the white heat of perfect communion.”

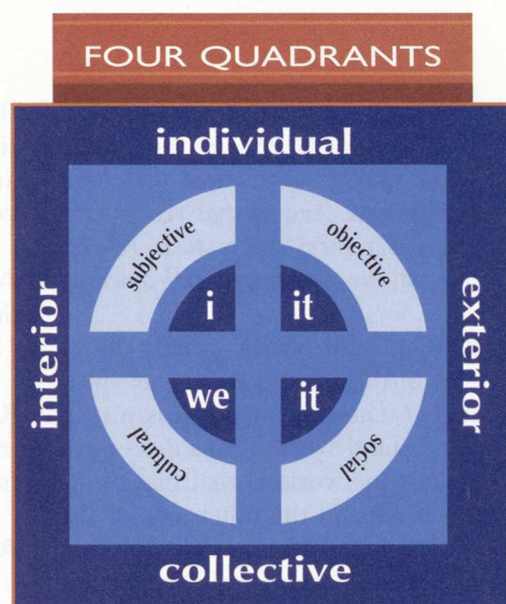
“I finally understood that this is actually enlightenment manifesting between us. It is unheard of that a group of unenlightened people, who are willing to leave self-concern behind, start to experience the enlightened vision and BE it. It is amazing

how easy it felt, really like a natural state . . . I see now why you call it Evolution!”

“This tremendous explosion has unalterably shifted our attention to a vast and unfathomable presence—it is as if this new cosmic Being speaks as us, through us, manifesting the bigger view that It alone perceives.”

It seems that it was both the collective nature of the event and the willingness of the participating individuals to bear witness to what was unfolding that made the emergence of this consciousness possible. This thing has happened a few times, among different groups of my students, and I realized that this expression of enlightenment beyond the personal was really the target that my teaching has been heading toward for the past sixteen years. I had never heard of anything else that sounded similar until I read about Sri Aurobindo's descent of the “supermind,” which sounded very much like what my students were experiencing. I was wondering if it sounded similar to you?*

KW: Well, yes. I wasn't present for the phenomenon you were describing, but I think I get a pretty good sense of it. And it does really tie in to what we were saying earlier. In a sense, the nondual realization, which at least became a historical realization for a fair number of people right around the turn of the century, including Sri Aurobindo, is still unfolding. I mean, the world of form keeps unfolding, keeps evolving—spirit's own self-expression keeps unfolding—and it happens, as far as we can tell, to



In Ken Wilber's “integral” map of existence, every being in manifest reality is seen to have at least four dimensions to it: an individual interior (subjective, “I”), an individual exterior (objective, “it”), a collective interior (cultural, “we”) and a collective exterior (social, “it”). Any model of reality that does not take all four of these dimensions into account, Wilber feels, cannot be complete.

build on what it did yesterday, which is why evolution is indeed an unfolding event in the world of form. So as this incarnational nonduality, this ultimately ecstatic tantric nonduality itself, began to unfold, and its forms of manifestation began to unfold, you find that by the time you get to people like Sri Aurobindo, there's *such* a full-bodied understanding of this process. Even though some of the earlier sages were ultimately enlightened for their time, there's a richness, an unfolding, a resonance of spirit's own incarnational understanding in some of these recent sages that just gives you goose bumps.

AC: Wow. So you're talking about the evolution of enlightenment itself.

KW: Yes. If we talk about enlightenment as the union of emptiness and form, the pure emptiness doesn't change because it doesn't enter the stream of time, but the form does change, and the two of those are inextricably united. And therefore, there is, in that sense, an evolution of enlightenment. And what we find in some of these sages, particularly in the modern era when evolution itself was understood—which is to say when evolution became part of the consciousness of spirit's manifestation—is an increasing transparency of enlightenment manifesting in the world of form. Under those circumstances, the type of descent that Sri Aurobindo was talking about, the descent of the supermind, is something that he certainly thought would be increasing in frequency as evolution continued. And I do think that's the case. The phenomenon you described certainly *sounds* like it would be kind of a miniature example of just that.

The notion of, in a sense, higher states coming down and grabbing people where they are and lifting

them up is itself an old notion. And I think there are many examples of lesser states, in a sense, descending upon people. You can be in the egoic state and have a descent of a subtle reality, for example. But I think that because the world has already been opened to nondual incarnational realization, we are going to see these things increasing in depth and profundity as time unfolds.

AC: For Aurobindo, though, wasn't the supermind still a theoretical ideal? I mean, as far as I know, he didn't succeed in bringing it down in the way that he wanted to—making it manifest in the world.

KW: Yes. That's correct. And that's why I say it's hard to know exactly what was going on with your group without everybody kind of having a look-see.

AC: Sure. Of course. But I think the important thing was that there was a very powerful meeting beyond the personal. There was the awareness that "I am going beyond the personal together with many others." In other words, there was a simultaneous realization of the nondifference between the One and the many, supported by the ecstatic realization that this is everything. And at the same time, there was the awareness of an overwhelming compulsion in the individual and the collective to give all of oneself to the greatest possibility that there is.

KW: Yes. I can tell you what I think that is, quite apart from whether it's a specific instance of Aurobindo's supermind. In my personal opinion, what was happening there was basically a perfect example of an all-quadrant nondual occasion. And as you know, the quadrants in my model represent I, We, and It [see

diagram]. And the general idea, in my own view, is that these aspects of experience are inextricably interconnected whether we realize it or not. So sometimes people can just give emphasis to the "I," but there's always the "we" and the "it" in the background, whether they're aware of it or not. And my basic belief—I've stated it in theoretical books, but I also believe it should be practiced—is that an integral spirituality would be all-quadrant, all levels. And all levels means, of course, that we're spanning the entire spectrum. We're not stopping at immersion in nature, we're not stopping at ascent into heaven, or mere *nirvana*, but we're embracing the nondual as well, so that we span the entire spectrum of consciousness. And then, that is manifest simultaneously, fully, and transparently in all four quadrants, or in the "I," the "we," and the "it" simultaneously. I think the fact that you have a *sangha*, a small community, that can work on this together for a long time has allowed, in the instance you described, a four-quadrant manifestation of that nondual realization. So that would be the good news. The bad news with all these things is, of course, that it's a messy process. And every time something great like that happens, there's all the shadow stuff that comes with it, and the recoil that comes with it, and the aftereffects.

AC: Absolutely. There's the egoic withdrawal, the rebellion against the sacred nature of what was revealed, and the profound terror of what it demanded.

KW: That's always difficult. It's where discriminating wisdom is so important. And the incredibly difficult thing is that, in some sense, we're all pioneers in this. It's a relatively new type of

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a song that goes on singing


an interview with

Dr. Beatrice Bruteau

by Amy Edelstein and Ellen Daly

THE EMERGING FIELD of evolutionary spirituality is not exactly overcrowded. Although interest in the connections between evolution and enlightenment has grown in recent years, there are still very few who have explored both the eternal verities of the spirit and the ever-changing structures of nature's unfolding design.

That is why we were thrilled last fall to come across the work of Dr. Beatrice Bruteau. For the past fifty-odd years, Dr. Bruteau has been charting a unique path through the worlds of science, philosophy, mathematics, evolutionary theory, and mysticism, East and West. "It all began," she explained to us one



afternoon from her office in North Carolina, "when I found a book on Ramakrishna at the Carnegie Public Library in Pittsburgh." Bruteau was working toward her combined master's degree in mathematics, philosophy, and religion at the university. "I used to sit on the big black stone bridge near the school, dangling

my feet over the edge, enthralled by Ramakrishna's philosophy. It spoke to me." A friend told her about the Ramakrishna Mission in New York City, and as soon as she had completed her degree, the independent-spirited Bruteau moved to Manhattan, next door to the Mission, and began studying Vedanta while

pursuing a doctorate in philosophy at Fordham University. "The 1950s," Bruteau reminisced, "were a very exciting time in New York. I met Brother David Steindl-Rast, who had just started studying with Tai Shimano Roshi; Rabbi Gelberman, who was connected with Swami Muktananda's ashram in India; Swami

Satchidananda; and so many others. I loved Vedanta, and I loved the Christian mystics, whom I started reading at the same time. And do you know what they told me in my classes at the Mission? They told me Catholicism was Vedanta in European dress."

Today a practicing Catholic, Dr. Bruteau's

wide-ranging interests have given her a unique combination of spiritual and scientific sensibilities. And in her prolific writings, she flows easily between the two, seeking the mystical in the material and the vast creativity of God in the temporal unfolding of the cosmos. She has the unusual distinction of having deeply studied the work of both Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo—the twentieth century’s great spiritual evolutionary pioneers—and has published several books exploring their visionary

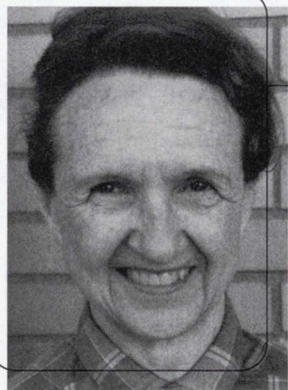
work. Like Teilhard de Chardin, Bruteau believes that we are at a unique juncture in history where, perhaps for the first time, evolution will not be primarily physical in nature but rather will be noetic—a transformation or mutation of consciousness. And human beings are in a crucial position. For in order to take this next evolutionary step, she tells us, we must actually become conscious participants in the unfolding and direction of the evolutionary process itself. It is to this “Grand Option” that Bruteau

calls us, to this great moment in human destiny, when “the universe will either go forward into the creation of higher level unities, or else it will eventually fall back into the dispersed homogeneity of maximal entropy. It all depends,” she writes, “on what we choose to do.”

Currently living in the small community of Pfafftown, just east of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Dr. Bruteau edits the quarterly journal *American Vedantist* and oversees two Christian contemplative orders,

even as she works on what will be her thirteenth book. Indeed, at the age of seventy-two, her creative energy seems inexhaustible, and she spoke as if we had all the time in the universe to get to know one another, reflect on the human adventure, and let the great mystery of evolution gradually unfold.

This interview received underwriting support from the *Trust for the Meditation Process*, a charitable foundation that supports the rediscovery of Christian contemplative practice and encourages dialogue and cooperation among all contemplative traditions.



Dr. Beatrice Bruteau

wie: In this issue we are exploring spiritual evolution and the relationship between enlightenment and evolution. You are one of the pioneering thinkers in evolutionary spirituality and your work has been devoted to bringing an evolutionary view to Christian contemplative life. In your book, God's Ecstasy, you have said, "Evolution is a part of religious life. Creativity is built into the natural world. And the Divine is the creative principle." Can you explain what you mean?

BEATRICE BRUTEAU: Somewhere deep down we are all filled with a mystical longing, with a longing for ultimate meaningfulness,

and therefore we need to see all of our world in that context. To attain this in today's climate, we need a new theology of the cosmos—one that is grounded in the best science of our day. It will be a theology in which God is very present precisely in all the dynamism and patterns of the created order. A theology of evolution sees God as deeply involved in the evolutionary process of the world. God is making the world by means of evolution. And the evolutionary process in its turn is seen as striving toward God. So, you see, God is Self-expressing and Self-realizing in evolution.

All sorts of wonderful creatures have been generated from a few simple principles and a handful of elementary particles. The creativity that makes the world is built into the



There is a basic urgency

in life to grow, to expand, to become new and renewed. . . .

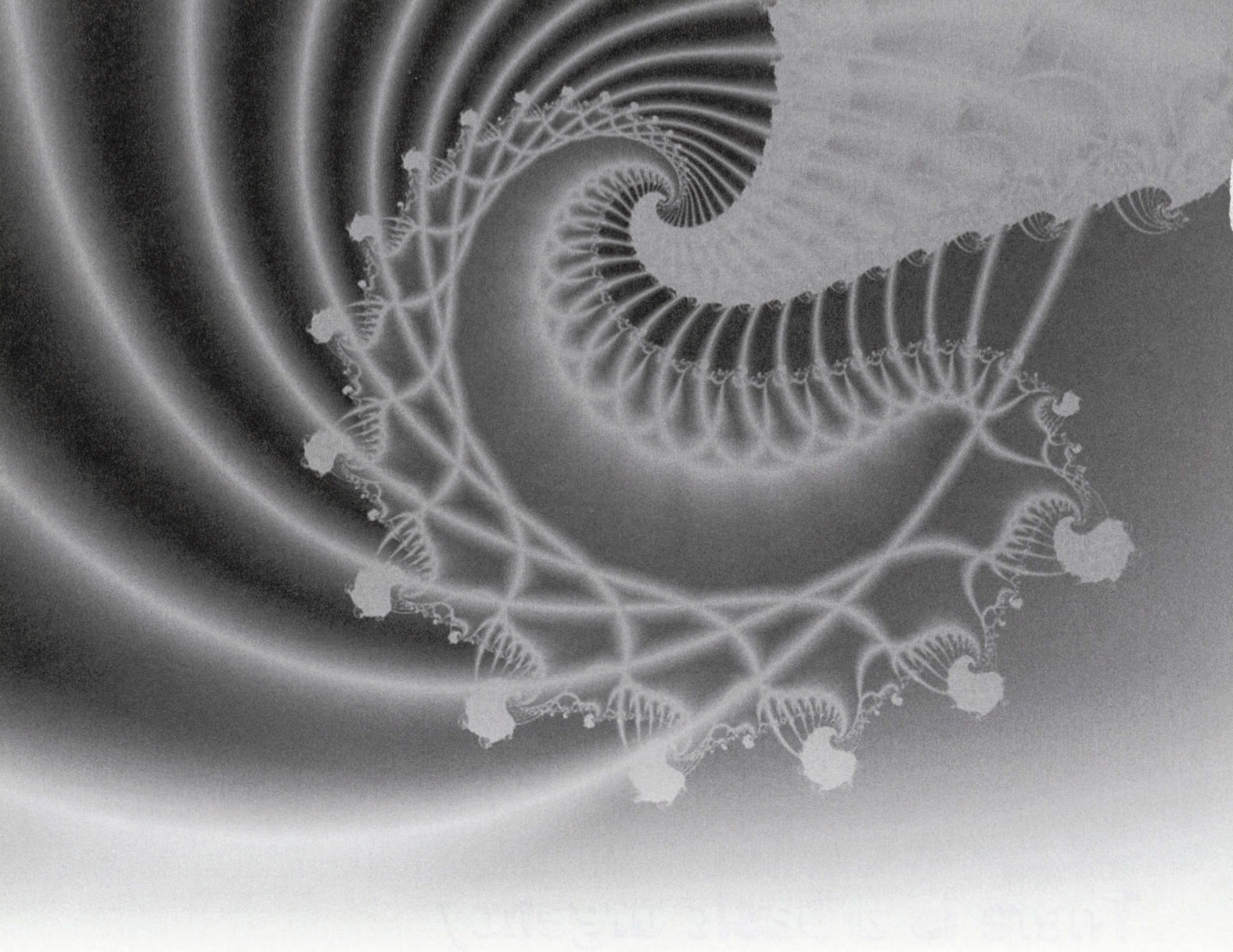
*At least one contemporary view of the cosmos sees it as
one huge, dynamic, evolving being that passes through
a series of stages in which its forms and internal relations
assume ever-new patterns.*

world as its own essence. And in this self-creating world there is gradually growing the most Godlike capacity, *consciousness*. The cosmic complexity has supported the development of consciousness, and now we can know and understand and contemplate this beautiful and marvelous universe. More and more, creatures know what they're doing, appreciate

their environment, *choose* their actions. And when you get to human beings, consciousness is aware of the fact that it is conscious. We try to understand where consciousness comes from, how it works, how we can manipulate it. At the human level, consciousness is trying to make new forms of consciousness. We've developed consciousness-altering

practices and we've taken consciousness-altering drugs. Now we're even making machines that do things we used to think only conscious brains could do. Thus, consciousness is evolving further consciousness.

WIE: *Can you describe what the movement or process of evolution actually is?*



BB: Evolution is the linked changing of the world. There is a basic urgency in life to grow, to expand, to become new and renewed. We might even say that the very meaning of being alive is to be constantly in the process of becoming a new creation. This happens on small scales with every biological form we know, and it happens on a large scale in the universe as a whole. At least one contemporary view of the cosmos sees it as one huge, dynamic, evolving being that passes through a series of stages in which its forms and internal relations assume ever-new patterns.

Some theorists of evolution point out that with each succeeding stage of development, the complexity of the patterns is increased. So evolution is the passage in time from simpler organizational forms to more complex organizational forms, carrying with it an increase of consciousness, which means a sense of unity in the organized entity. Now, this process is usually thought of as advancing by a series of small steps. But sometimes there is a Great Step. Great Steps occur when the cosmic organization goes to another level of complexity. It does this by uniting elements of

the preceding level. These are what French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin called “creative unions”: they bring into being something that *never existed before*. The New Being emerges from the connections and interactions of the composing units, and it constitutes a new level of oneness and wholeness.

Creative Union

WIE: Could you say more about Teilhard’s view of an evolutionary progression toward greater and greater degrees of unity?

BB: As I said, in Teilhard's view, all of evolution has progressed by a series of creative unions. More complex and more conscious beings are formed by the union of less complex and less conscious elements with one another. Subatomic particles unite to form atoms, atoms unite to form molecules, molecules unite to form cells, and cells unite to form organisms. This same pattern of creating something new, something more complex and more conscious, by the union of the less complex and less conscious recurs at each of these levels. It is because we can look back and see the pattern, see it recurring, that Teilhard believes we can legitimately extrapolate and project the pattern into the future, looking forward to another creative union in which we will be the uniting elements.

WIE: How do these "creative unions" come about?

BB: What Teilhard says is that each time this occurs there is an exchange of "characteristic energy" among the uniting elements. For instance, the characteristic energy of atoms is electrical energy. It is by *sharing* this energy among themselves that the atoms make themselves into molecules. The

atoms are capable of making *connections* with one another, and then they interact to form the union. So in order for us as human beings to unite with one another to form the next creative union, according to the same pattern that the atoms and molecules and cells followed before us, we must share with one another our characteristic energies. It is the energy sharing that forms the bond. The characteristic energy at the level we have now reached is *human energy*. And what is human energy? It is not just physical energy or chemical energy or biological energy. It is the energy of thinking, or knowing, and the energy of loving, or willing. It is this most intimate energy of ours that we are asked to commit to the new union. In other words, we are being asked to give ourselves *as persons* in order to create a higher-level New Being. The question, however, is whether human beings will actually do this enough to form the next level of cosmic evolution.

So you see, at this point, evolution meets a situation that is unique in its history: the uniting elements, in our case, are free agents. We will not automatically unite merely because of some natural affinity. Since each of us is free, we can each choose whether we will enter into the proposed union or not. Thus the

union, the New Being, the next creative advance of evolution, will come about only if we freely consent to form it because the energy exchange itself, which forms the bond of the new-level cosmic organization, consists of free acts. This is why Teilhard says that the whole cosmic enterprise now hangs on our decision: *we are evolution*.

WIE: So human beings are in a unique position, and we bear a great responsibility for what happens. You could say that we are at a crucial evolutionary juncture.

BB: Yes we are. And in order to appreciate and feel the force of what the present human vocation is, we need to zero in on how the elements of any particular level of cosmic organization actually perform the *uniting* by which they come to constitute a new kind of wholeness in the world. There is not some outside force that causes this to occur. The capacity for it is inherent in the uniting elements, and they themselves do it by their own characteristic power. Every level of cosmic being has its own power of communication, the power to unite with others of its level to make something yet grander. This is the pattern that repeats in the course of evolution.

If the evolutionary pattern repeats

*at our level, then we are to form
a new kind of further Being,
a Being born of our voluntary togetherness
that will be able to do things
that we singly cannot do.*

And this, therefore, is the clue to our human vocation, the next stage of the cosmic evolution. Human beings have a far more wonderful power of communication than have atoms. If the pattern repeats at our level, then we are to exercise that power to form a new kind of further Being, a Being born of our voluntary togetherness that will be able to do things that we singly cannot do.

Human Choice

WIE: *The great evolutionary thinkers have all also made the point that the human ability to choose, to intelligently exercise free will or volition, is what sets us apart from other creatures. Can you say a little more about the significance of choice?*

BB: You see, evolution up to this point has gone by happenstance and natural selection. The individual animal doesn't get to choose how it's going to evolve. But the individual human being can, and we, by our concerted intention, can make something that hasn't existed before. If we are to make this change in favor of forming a New Being, we will have to redirect our energy currents. And it will take energy even to make that option. You see, our

energy currents are egocentric—the currents flow out from the ego, grasp what's good for the ego, and flow back to the ego. This energy pattern cannot form a creative union because it tries to assimilate all other beings to the being of the ego. And because of that, it's important that we make a big effort to realize the True Self—otherwise we're running entirely on the motives to exploit and dominate—the motives that are endangering the world.

WIE: *Is this why you say in your books that Self-realization, or enlightenment, is “the foundation for evolution”? Do you mean that for the next step of evolution to occur, we must transcend our ego motivations, those impulses that fundamentally keep us separate from each other?*

BB: Yes. Self-realization is the condition for forming the next creative union because we must bring the characteristic human energy to the place where we can intentionally share it. To form a truly New Being, to make another Great Step in evolution, we have to unite the deepest, most central energies of consciousness. This depth is currently buried and hidden in most of us. Yet, we also sense that it is there, waiting to be brought into full presence, and

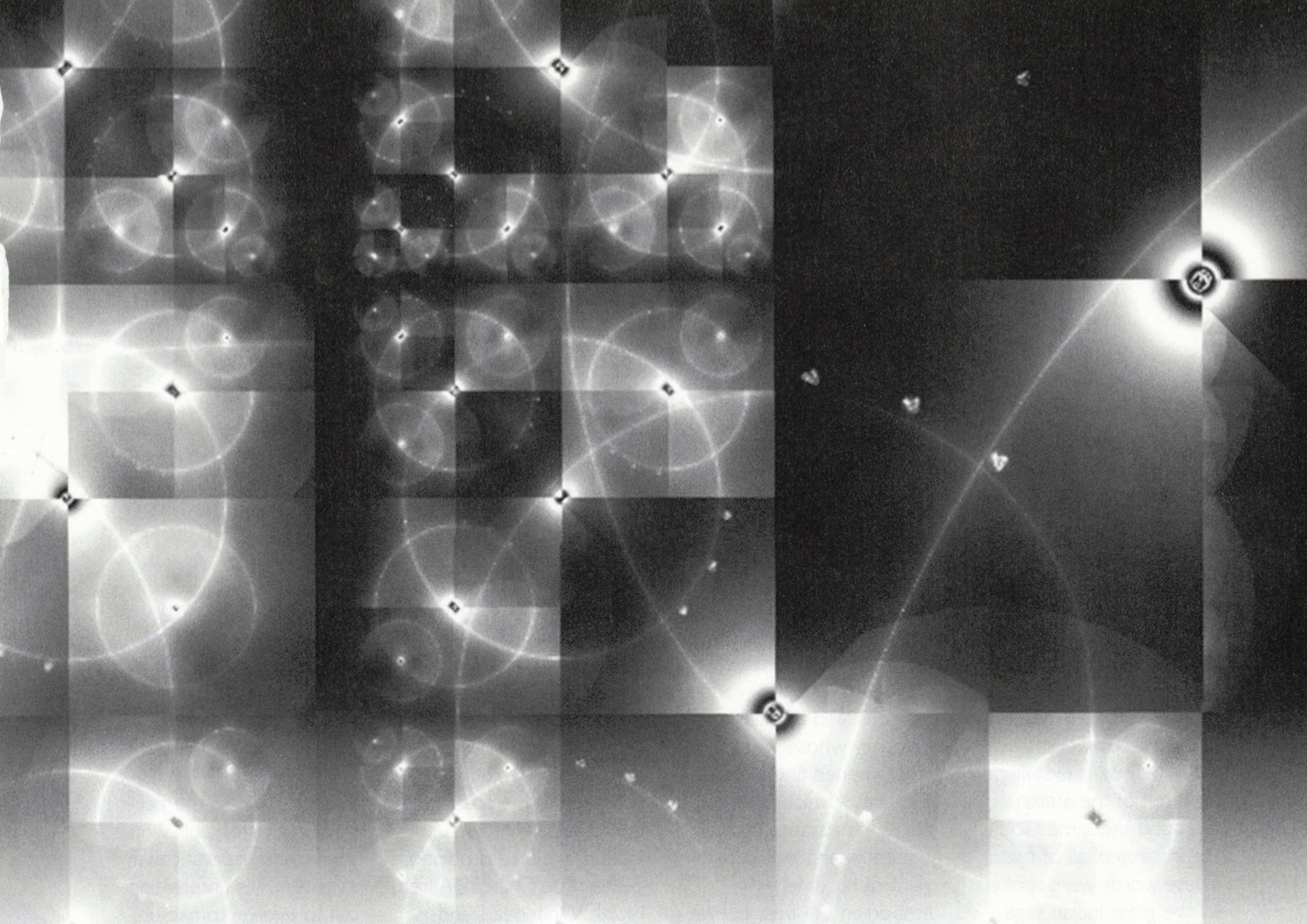
so we do various spiritual practices in the hope of becoming fully aware of our deep reality.

WIE: *What do you mean by “deep reality”?*

BB: Deep reality is that place in the center of our being where we experience our existence in an unlimited way. The deep self is not defined, not described by any of the qualities of our bodies or personalities, by our histories or social positions, our jobs, or our religions. This is fairly hard to realize. We tend to think of ourselves, introduce ourselves to others, believe others are seeing us in terms of these qualities. In meditation and its associated practices, we try to center ourselves in our sense of existing without identifying with these descriptors. To the extent that we become accustomed to this, we may spontaneously behave in a new way.

You can see from this how our energy is affected. When we define ourselves in terms of our qualities, we have to devote energy to protecting them and trying to gain more valuable ones—more beauty, personality, wealth, power, social status. But if we liberate ourselves from such identity, then all that energy becomes available for the

We cannot wait *for the world to turn,
for the times to change that we may change with them,
for the revolution to come and carry us round in its new course.
No more will the evolutionary forces of nature propel us
in their groping way through the next critical point into a new
state of being. From now on, if we are to have any future,
we must create that future ourselves.*



radiation of goodwill to others. We have realized ourselves as the Self that says only I AM, with no predicate following, not "I am a this" or "I have that quality." Only unlimited, absolute I AM.

And the interesting thing is that as soon as you experience yourself this way, you at once find that you also are saying toward the whole world, "Let it be!" It seems to be the nature of that which is I AM to say, "Let it be." This is the love that is called "agape." Agape is the love that seeks the *being*, well-being, full being, ever-fuller being, of the beloved. It is a love that is not a reaction to the beloved but rather a first action, an

action beginning in you, coming out from the center of your being because of the nature of your being. This energy of love is inexhaustible. It doesn't have to be reserved or apportioned or used economically. It is plentiful, bountiful, enormous. It is a dynamic out-flowing activity, energy. It's constantly in motion and radiant, like a star is radiant. It streams out from us in every way. The True Self in us is constantly radiating this willed goodness.

A New Being

WIE: *At times you've characterized agape or "creative love" as a future-*

seeking or, could we say, evolutionary movement, the intention of which, as you've put it, "is to bring something new into being."

BB: It is a will to being—it's the ultimate energy of God, if you want to call it that. This intention to *share being* is agape. And it is central, it is original, it is Source. When you discover it, you discover that *you are that*—that the most "self" thing that you are is that. This is what people find when they have what's called Self-realization. And it's an energy that has no limit. The central or True Self that is the truth of our being is continuous with the

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Swami Vivekananda on

strong

Darwin, Evolution, and the Perfect Man

"THE WHOLE OBJECT of [the Hindu religion] is, by constant struggle, to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God, and see God. . . . Every religion is evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them." These words were spoken by the great Indian sage Swami Vivekananda to the Parliament of World's Religions in 1893. So striking was the impact of Swami Vivekananda's words and presence on those gathered at the conference that many say the beginning of the modern East-West spiritual dialogue can be traced back to that summer day in Chicago more than a century ago.

A student of the renowned Indian spiritual master Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda was the first great Hindu teacher to bring the message of the mystical East to the Western world, opening doors that many more would walk through in the twentieth century.

A champion of the Hindu tradition, a passionate advocate for tolerance and respect among the world's religions, and a social revolutionary whose words strengthened and inspired a nation, Vivekananda was a true renaissance figure, a spiritual and intellectual giant of his time, who embodied the best of East and West in his spiritual values and personal character. Familiar with the story of his extraordinary life, none of us at WIE had any doubt about the well-deserved place that Vivekananda occupies in religious history nor about his groundbreaking attempts to lower the barriers between East and West. But what we did not know was that he was also one of the first Eastern teachers to grapple with Darwin's evolutionary theory and to formulate a Hindu philosophy that sought to embrace the emerging evolutionary worldview of the Western scientific community.

Living just decades

after Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, Vivekananda was well versed in Western science and philosophy, and saw no inherent conflict between an evolutionary cosmos and the great tradition of Indian Vedanta. Indeed, like Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and other twentieth-century visionaries, Vivekananda saw the evolution revolution not as a threat to the spiritual life but as an opportunity to enrich our understanding of the movements of spirit in all aspects of the material world. His work was an inspiration to many, in particular to Sri Aurobindo, another great champion of Mother India, who considered himself something of a student of Vivekananda's life and work.

So as we set out in this issue of WIE to explore the new evolutionary spirituality that is emerging from the intermingling of Eastern and Western worldviews, we were curious to take a

closer look at the words of the man who did so much to pave the way for the future. More than a century after Swami Vivekananda's short but extraordinary life left its distinct mark on the pages of world history, his words seem more relevant than ever. And his unrelenting call to evolve, to rise up, to struggle to perfect ourselves in the image of God is a powerful antidote to a postmodern spiritual culture that too often forgets that inherent in the evolution of the spirit is the demand for a profound and personal transformation of the "material man."

—Carter Phipps

Note: We chose to keep Vivekananda's original use of the male gender pronoun, as in "Perfect Man" and "He," to denote God or universal intelligence, as a function of his time and culture.

The following chapters are excerpted from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), and appear here by permission of the publisher.

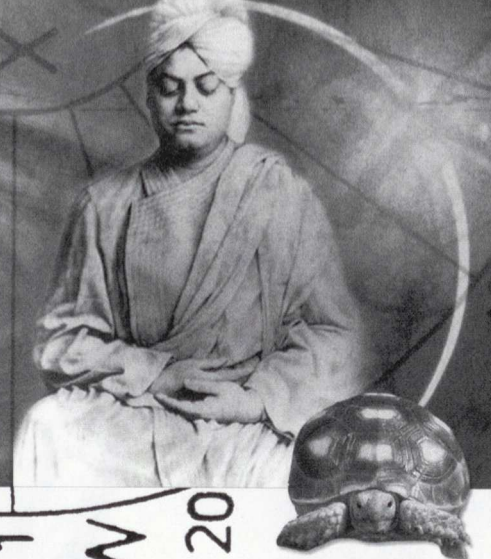
est

sacrifice

revolution



Calcutta 1898



Part I from Conversations and Dialogues

SWAMIJI, ACCOMPANIED by Sister Nivedita, Swami Y., and others, had come to visit the Zoological Gardens at Alipur in the afternoon. Rai Rambrahma Sanyal Bahadur, Superintendent of the Gardens, cordially received them and took them round the Gardens. Swamiji, as he went on seeing the various species of animals, casually referred to the Darwinian theory of the gradual evolution of animals. The disciple remembers how, entering the room for snakes, he pointed to a huge python with circular rings on its body, with the remark: "From this, the tortoise has evolved in course of time. That very snake, by remaining stationary at one spot for a long time, has gradually turned hard-backed." He further said in fun to the disciple, "You eat tortoises, don't you? Darwin holds that it is this snake that has evolved into the tortoise in the process of time—then you eat snakes too!" The disciple protested, "Sir, when a thing is metamorphosed into another thing through evolution, it has no more its former shape and habits; then how can you say that eating tortoise means eating snakes also?"

This answer created laughter among the party. After seeing some

other things, Swamiji went to Rambrahma Babu's quarters in the Gardens, where he took tea, and others also did the same. Finding that the disciple hesitated to sit at the same table and partake of the sweets and tea which Sister Nivedita had touched [because it violated the rules of the Brahmin priest caste], Swamiji repeatedly urged him to take them, which he was induced to do, and drinking some water himself, Swamiji gave the rest of it to the disciple to drink. After this, there was a short conversation on Darwin's evolution theory.

Rambrahma Babu: What is your opinion of the evolution theory of Darwin and the causes he has put forward for it?

Swamiji: Taking for granted that Darwin is right, I cannot yet admit that it is the final conclusion about the causes of evolution.

Rambrahma Babu: Did the ancient scholars of our country discuss this subject?

Swamiji: The subject has been nicely discussed in the Sankhya Philosophy. I am of opinion that the

conclusion of the ancient Indian philosophers is the last word on the causes of evolution.

Rambrahma Babu: I shall be glad to hear of it, if it can be explained in a few words.

Swamiji: You are certainly aware of the laws of struggle for existence, survival of the fittest, natural selection, and so forth, which have been held by the Western scholars to be the causes of elevating a lower species to a higher. But none of these has been advocated as the cause of that in the system of Patanjali. Patanjali holds that the transformation of one species into another is effected by the "in-filling of nature." It is not that this is done by the constant struggle against obstacles. In my opinion, struggle and competition sometimes stand in the way of a being's attaining its perfection. If the evolution of an animal is effected by the destruction of a thousand others, then one must confess that this evolution is doing very little good to the world. Taking it for granted that it conduces to physical well-being, we cannot help admitting that it is a serious obstacle to spiritual development.

According to the philosophers of our country, every being is a perfect Soul, and the diversity of evolution and manifestation of nature is simply due to the difference in the degree of manifestation of this Soul. The moment the obstacles to the evolution and manifestation of nature are completely removed, the Soul manifests Itself perfectly. Whatever may happen in the lower strata of nature's evolutions, in the higher strata at any rate, it is not true that it is only by constantly struggling against obstacles that one has to go beyond them. Rather it is observed that there the obstacles give way and a greater manifestation of the Soul takes place through education and culture, through concentration and meditation, and above all through sacrifice. Therefore, to designate the obstacles not as the effects but as the causes of the Soul-manifestation, and describe them as aiding this wonderful diversity of nature, is not consonant with reason. The attempt to remove evil from the world by killing a thousand evil-doers only adds to the evil in the world. But if the people can

be made to desist from evil-doing by means of spiritual instruction, there is no more evil in the world. Now, see how horrible the Western struggle theory becomes!

Rambrahma Babu was astonished to hear Swamiji's words and said at length, "India badly needs at the present moment men well versed in the Eastern and Western philosophies like you. Such men alone are able to point out the mistakes of the educated people who see only one side of the shield. I am extremely delighted to hear your original explanation of the evolution theory."

Shortly after, Swamiji, with the party, left for Baghbazar and reached Balaram Bose's house at about 8 p.m. After a short rest, he came to the drawing-room, where there was a small gathering, all eager to hear of the conversation at the Zoological Gardens in detail. When Swamiji came to the room, the disciple, as the spokesman of the meeting, raised that very topic.

Disciple: Sir, I have not been able to follow all your remarks about the

evolution theory at the Zoo. Will you kindly recapitulate them in simple words?

Swamiji: Why, which points did you fail to grasp?

Disciple: You have often told us that it is the power to struggle with the external forces which constitutes the sign of life and the first step towards improvement. Today you seem to have spoken just the opposite thing.

Swamiji: Why should I speak differently? It was you who could not follow me. In the animal kingdom we really see such laws as struggle for existence, survival of the fittest, etc., evidently at work. Therefore, Darwin's theory seems true to a certain extent. But in the human kingdom, where there is the manifestation of rationality, we find just the reverse of those laws. For instance, in those whom we consider really great men or ideal characters, we scarcely observe any external struggle. In the animal kingdom instinct prevails; but the more a man

Every evolution is preceded by an involution.
The seed is the father of the tree,
but another tree was itself the father
of the seed. The seed is the fine form out of
which the big tree comes, and another big tree was
the form which is involved in that seed.
The whole of this universe was present
in the cosmic fine universe.

advances, the more he manifests rationality. For this reason, progress in the rational human kingdom cannot be achieved, like that in the animal kingdom, by the destruction of others! The highest evolution of man is effected through sacrifice alone. A man is great among his fellows in proportion as he can sacrifice for the sake of others, while in the lower strata of the animal kingdom, that animal is the strongest which can kill the greatest number of animals. Hence the struggle theory is not equally applicable to both kingdoms. Man's struggle is in the mental sphere. A man is greater in proportion as he can control his mind. When the mind's activities are perfectly at rest, the Atman manifests Itself. The struggle which we observe in the animal kingdom for the preservation of the gross body has its use in the human plane of existence for gaining mastery over the mind or for attaining the state of balance. Like a living tree and its reflection in the water of a tank, we find opposite kinds of struggle in the animal and human kingdoms.

Disciple: Why then do you advocate so much the improvement of our physique?

Swamiji: Well, do you consider yourselves as men? You have got only a bit of rationality—that's all. How will you struggle with the mind unless the physique be strong? Do you deserve to be called men any longer—the highest evolution in the world? What have you got besides eating, sleeping, and satisfying the creature-comforts? Thank your stars that you have not developed into quadrupeds yet! Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He is the man who is conscious of his dignity." You are but standing witnesses to the lowest class of

insect-like existence of which the scripture speaks, that they simply undergo the round of births and deaths without being allowed to go to any of the higher spheres! You are simply living a life of jealousy among yourselves and are objects of hatred in the eyes of the foreigner. You are animals, therefore I recommend you to struggle. Leave aside theories and all that. Just reflect calmly on your own everyday acts and dealings and find out whether you are not a species of beings intermediate between the animal and human planes of existence! First build up your physique. Then only you can get control over the mind. "This Self is not to be attained by the weak." (Katha Upanishad, 1. ii. 23).

Disciple: But, sir, the commentator (Shankara) has interpreted the word "weak" to mean "devoid of Brahmacharya or continence."

Swamiji: Let him. I say, "The physically weak are unfit for the realization of the Self."

Disciple: But many dull-headed persons also have strong bodies.

Swamiji: If you can take the pains to give them good ideas once, they will be able to work them out sooner than physically unfit people. Don't you find in a weak physique it is difficult to control the sex-appetite or anger? Overly thin people are quickly incensed and are quickly overcome by the sex-instinct.

Disciple: But we find exceptions to the rule also.

Swamiji: Who denies it? Once a person gets control over the mind, it matters little whether the body remains strong or becomes emaciated.

The gist of the thing is that unless one has a good physique one can never aspire to Self-realization. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "One fails to attain realization if there be but a slight defect in the body."

Finding that Swamiji had grown excited, the disciple did not dare to push the topic further, but remained quiet, accepting Swamiji's view. Shortly after, Swamiji, addressing those present, said, "By the bye, have you heard that this 'priest' has today taken food which was touched by [Sister] Nivedita? That he took the sweets touched by her did not matter so much, but"—here he addressed the disciple—"how did you drink the water she had touched?"

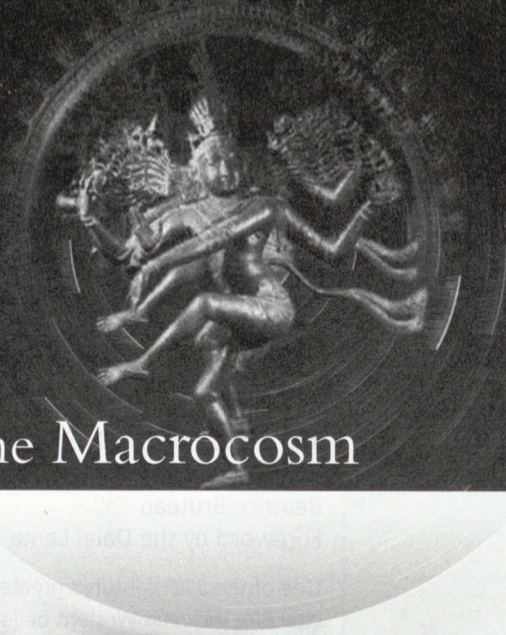
Disciple: But it was you, sir, who ordered me to do so. Under the Guru's orders I can do anything. I was unwilling to drink the water though. But you drank it and I had to take it as *prasada* [a sacred offering.]

Swamiji: Well, your caste is gone forever. Now nobody will respect you as a Brahmin of the priest class.

Disciple: I don't care if they do not. I can take the rice from the house of a Pariah if you order me to.

These words set Swamiji and all those present in a roar of laughter. The conversation lasted till it was past midnight, when the disciple came back to his lodging, only to find it bolted. So he had to pass the night out of doors.

The wheel of Time has rolled on in its unrelenting course, and Swamiji, Swami Y., and Sister Nivedita are now no more on earth. Only the sacred memory of their lives remains—and the disciple considers himself blessed to be able to record, in ever so meager a way, these reminiscences.



Part II

The Cosmos: The Macrocosm

OUT OF WHAT HAS THIS universe been produced then? From a preceding fine universe. Out of what has man been produced? The preceding fine form. Out of what has the tree been produced? Out of the seed; the whole of the tree was there in the seed. It comes out and becomes manifest. So, the whole of this universe has been created out of this very universe existing in a minute form. It has been made manifest now. It will go back to that minute form, and again will be made manifest. Now we find that the fine forms slowly come out and become grosser and grosser until they reach their limit, and when they reach their limit they go back further and further, becoming finer and finer again. This coming out of the fine and becoming gross, simply changing the arrangements of its parts, as it were, is what in modern times is called evolution. This is very true, perfectly true; we see it in our lives. No rational man can possibly quarrel with these evolutionists. But we have to learn one thing more. We have to go one step further, and what is that? That every evolution is preceded by an involution. The seed is the father of the tree, but another tree was itself the father of the seed. The seed is the fine form out of which the big tree comes, and another big tree was the form which is

involved in that seed. The whole of this universe was present in the cosmic fine universe. The little cell, which becomes afterwards the man, was simply the involved man and becomes evolved as a man. If this is clear, we have no quarrel with the evolutionists, for we see that if they admit this step, instead of their destroying religion, they will be the greatest supporters of it.

We see then, that nothing can be created out of nothing. Everything exists through eternity, and will exist through eternity. Only the movement is in succeeding waves and hollows, going back to fine forms, and coming out into gross manifestations. This involution and evolution is going on throughout the whole of nature. The whole series of evolution, beginning with the lowest manifestation of life and reaching up to the highest, the most perfect man, must have been the involution of something else. The question is: The involution of what? What was involved? God. The evolutionist will tell you that your idea that it was God is wrong. Why? Because you see God is intelligent, but we find that intelligence develops much later on in the course of evolution. It is in man and the higher animals that we find intelligence, but millions of years have passed in this world before this intelligence

came. This objection of the evolutionists does not hold water, as we shall see by applying our theory. The tree comes out of the seed, goes back to the seed; the beginning and the end are the same. The earth comes out of its cause and returns to it. We know that if we can find the beginning we can find the end. *E converso*, if we find the end we can find the beginning. If that is so, take this whole evolutionary series, from the protoplasm at one end to the perfect man at the other, and this whole series is one life. In the end we find the perfect man, so in the beginning it must have been the same. Therefore, the protoplasm was the involution of the highest intelligence. You may not see it but that involved intelligence is what is uncoiling itself until it becomes manifested in the most perfect man. That can be mathematically demonstrated. If the law of conservation of energy is true, you cannot get anything out of a machine unless you put it in there first. The amount of work that you get out of an engine is exactly the same as you have put into it in the form of water and coal, neither more nor less. The work I am doing now is just what I put into me, in the shape of air, food, and other things. It is only a question of change and manifestation. There cannot be added in the economy of

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AVATARS OF **EVOLUTION** *THE YOGIS*

THE FUTURE OF
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why SRI AUROBINDO is cool

WIE proves that sometimes
even dead gurus kick ass . . .

By Craig Hamilton

"BUT SRI AUROBINDO is cool!" I exclaimed to Andrew Cohen, my spiritual teacher and editor-in-chief.

"Yes, we know that, but how are you going to communicate that to our readers?" he asked.

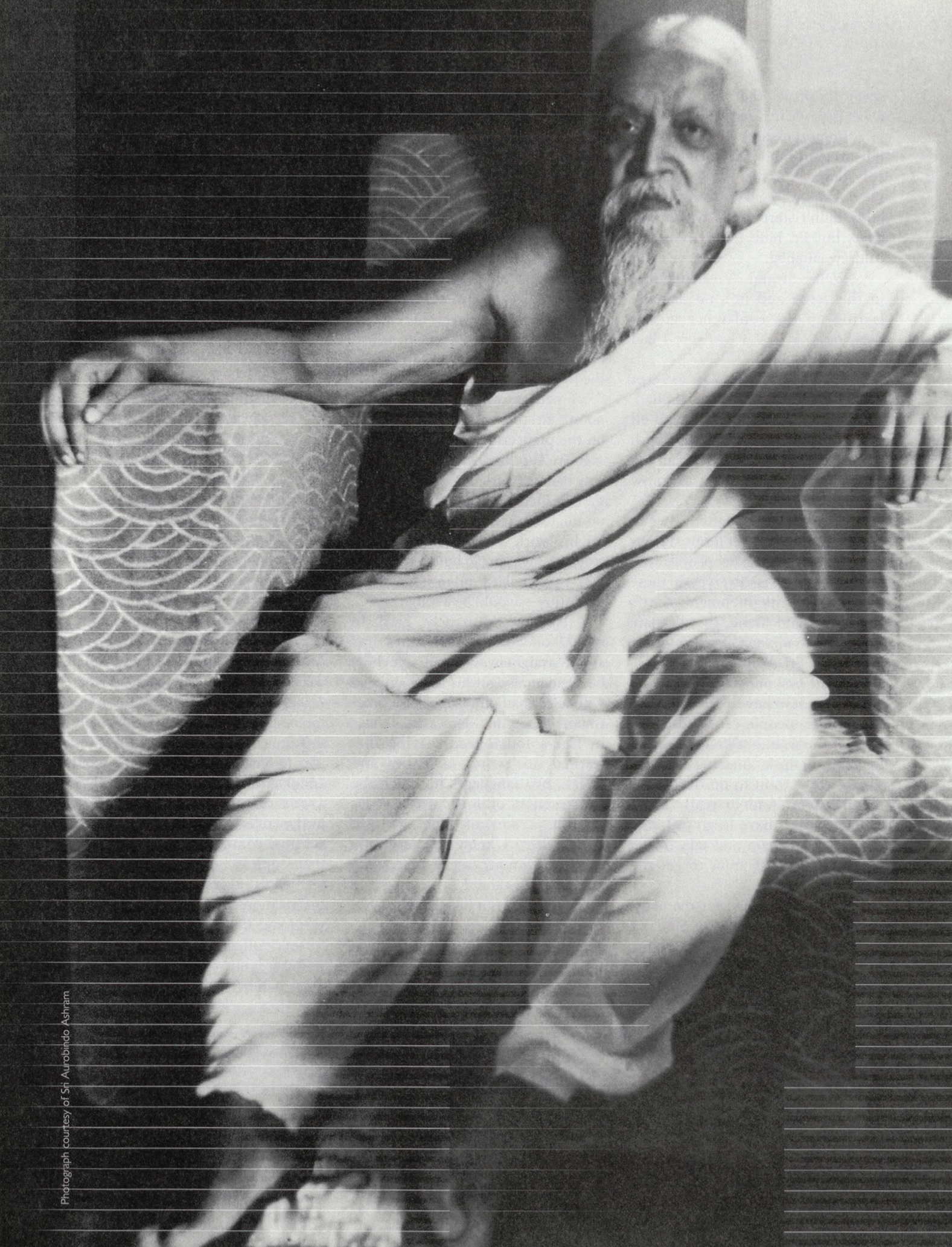
"Won't it be enough for me to just tell them his incredible story? I mean, check it out: *Controversial freedom fighter attains enlightenment in jail and relinquishes leadership of the revolution to become one of the greatest philosopher/yogis and evolutionary thinkers to have ever lived.* You've got to admit, that's one hell of a headline."

Andrew smiled. "Okay. Maybe

for the *Enlightenment Times*. But listen, there's one problem. He's a dead guru. A great dead guru, no doubt. An amazing dead guru. Probably one of the most extraordinary dead gurus the world has ever known. But face it, he's old news. We're *What Is Enlightenment?* We're cutting edge. This is about *living* inquiry. We don't do dead gurus. As Adi Da said . . ."

"... *dead gurus don't kick ass!*" My colleagues finished his sentence in chorus.

I couldn't believe we were having this conversation. "What about Babaji?" I leapt up. "Nobody can



Photograph courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram

seem to prove that he was *ever* alive! And we're doing *him*!"

"Immortal sages are one thing. But Sri Aurobindo has been decidedly buried for fifty years. I know the doctors were all amazed that his body didn't start to decay for four days, but I'd hate to see it now," Andrew laughed.

"Well, Swami Vivekananda's in this issue and he's not exactly tearing up the conference circuit these days, is he?" I was sure I had him with this one.

"It's okay to print an excerpt from someone's book," he replied, "but you're asking us to fly you all the way to India to do in-depth research on someone we can all read everything we need to know about on the web."

"But look," I pleaded, "we're doing an issue on evolutionary enlightenment. How many people even know what that is? Everybody these days thinks enlightenment is the end, the grand finale, the ultimate blast-off into *nirvana* never to return again. But Sri Aurobindo GOT IT. He was the first one to get it. And he got it like few have ever gotten it since. Sure, people can read about him on the web, but first they have to find out how amazing he was. That's why I want to do this piece, to tell them. And to really do it right, I think I have to go to India, to visit his ashram and talk to the people who knew him, to get the real inside story."

Andrew motioned for me to sit down. "Okay, listen," he said. "I can't argue with what you're saying. And I'm not going to say there's no way you can do it. But before I agree

to send you halfway around the world, you've got to come up with some kind of angle, some way to bring Sri Aurobindo alive that is hip, modern, intriguing, and, most of all, *relevant* to enlightenment in the twenty-first century. This can't just be another rehash of the old story. Give it some thought and we'll talk again tomorrow."

As we wrapped up our daily editorial meeting, it was all I could do to contain my excitement. It had been tough going, but I had gained the foothold I'd been hoping for.

I had shown up at that afternoon's meeting with a stack of books on the pioneering twentieth-century sage Sri Aurobindo, knowing I probably had my work cut out for me. Although I had no doubt that everyone on the team had tremendous respect for his work, I knew that a feature story about a great figure from the past—particularly in an issue about the future—would be a tough sell.

"Isn't he extremely hard to read?" one of my colleagues had asked straightaway, "as if somehow he accidentally got his genes crossed with a German philosopher or something?" I couldn't deny that he was in fact a tough read, having first learned to write in Latin and Greek, two languages in which the construction of long sentences is actually a sort of high art. But nonetheless, I knew that my only chance to win my case lay in reading a few passages aloud:

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom

and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god.

That got their attention. I read a little more:

... for the full and perfect fulfillment of the evolutionary urge, [the spiritual] illumination and change must take up and re-create the whole being, mind, life and body: it must be not only an inner experience of the Divinity but a remoulding of both the inner and outer existence by its power; it must take form not only in the life of the individual but as a collective life of gnostic beings established as a highest power and form of the becoming of the Spirit in the earth-nature.

After reading a few more pages in the same vein, I looked around at their faces. They were captivated. I wasn't surprised. In the course of our research for this issue, we had already come upon some extraordinary evolutionary thinkers, but Sri Aurobindo's words carried a spiritual weight like no one else we had read. A weight that, in light of our issue topic, and our reasons for choosing this topic now, meant a lot. For the idea to do an issue on evolution and enlightenment had been triggered by a series of unexpected breakthroughs in the collective practice of our own spiritual community. Breakthroughs that, unless we were all crazy, seemed to suggest a great deal about the relationship between enlightenment and humanity's potential for a further collective evolution. So far, however, none of the traditional religions had been able to shed light on

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the many, many people at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Sri Aurobindo Association, and Auroville International who went far beyond the call of duty to help us in the research and creation of this article. We would especially like to thank Richard Pearson and Kailash Jhaveri for their tireless and selfless hospitality and guidance; Lynda Lester for her generous outpouring of ideas and suggestions; David Hutchinson for his lightning fast and full responses to even the most esoteric of questions; Vishnu Eschner for his invaluable help in organizing the trip, as well as Julian and Wendy Lines, Sam Spanier, Chandresh Patel, Anie Nunally, Bhaga, Manoj Das, Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet, and Vijay at the Sri Aurobindo Society.

our experience. But on page after page, Sri Aurobindo was coming through in spades.

Although reading aloud from Sri Aurobindo had made our entire editorial team curious to learn more about his teachings, it had only brought me a hair's breadth closer to my goal. As I left the meeting that afternoon, it was clear that I still had a lot more persuading to do before I would be on my way to India. That night, while ruminating over how I could possibly convince the world that Sri Aurobindo was cool, I got a sudden flash of what I hoped was inspiration. And after spending the better part of the night trying to put it into words, I showed up at the next afternoon's meeting ready for another round.

"I want to read you what I've written," I jumped in at the start of the meeting before anyone could even mention the day's news.

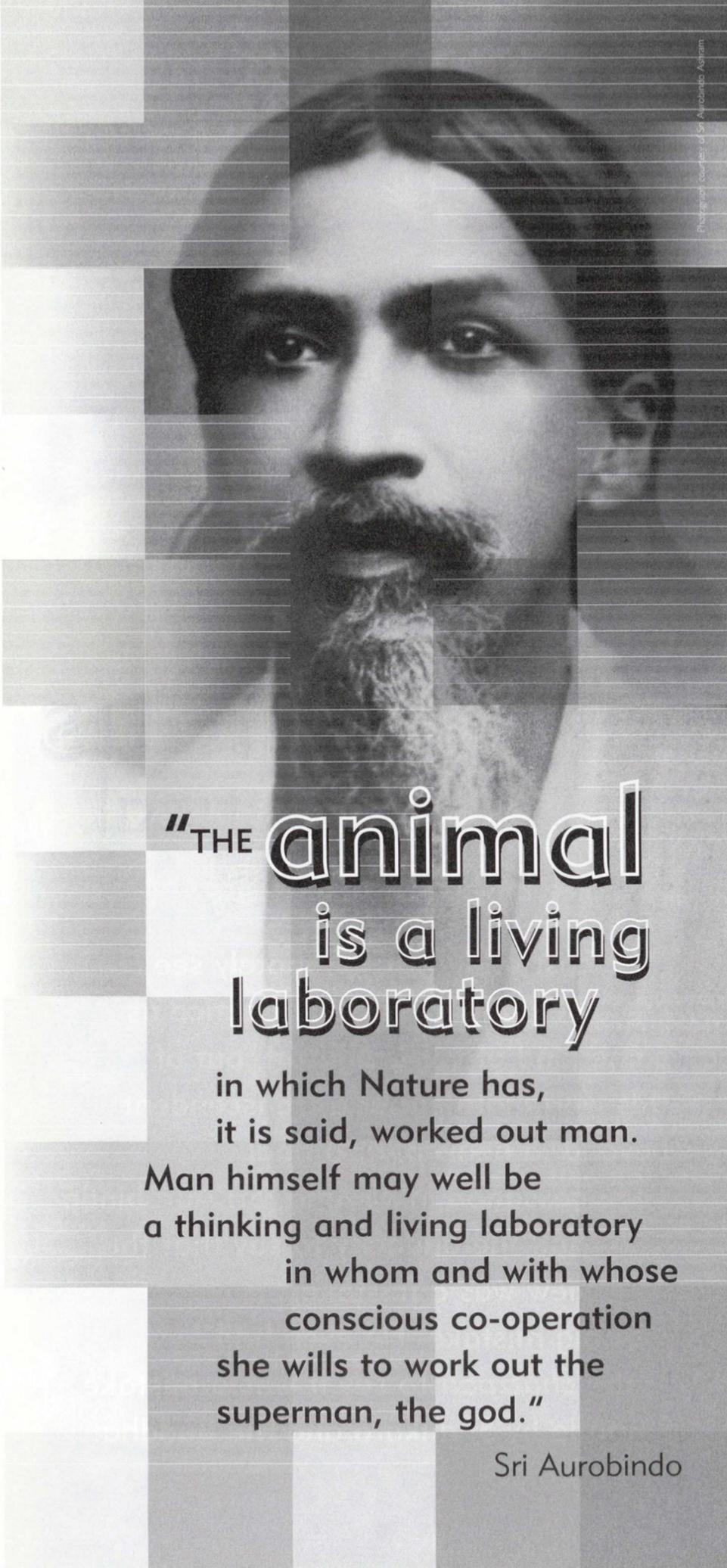
"Written?" Andrew looked slightly puzzled. "About what?"

"About Sri Aurobindo," I answered confidently. "I thought about what you said about needing to make him look cool, and I think I've got an angle. I've already written the first four pages."

"That's a new one," he laughed. "Writing the piece *before* you do the research. If we could all do that, maybe we could start coming out quarterly. It would save us a lot on airfares, too. Well, what are you waiting for? Let's hear it."

I began:

When most of us think of Sri Aurobindo, we probably think of that famous image of him, sitting there in that throne of a chair, long white beard and hair, looking like something straight out of a Hollywood movie in which he was cast in the role of God. You can almost imagine his voice, thundering with frightening authority in perfect King James



"THE animal
is a living
laboratory

in which Nature has,
it is said, worked out man.

Man himself may well be
a thinking and living laboratory
in whom and with whose
conscious co-operation
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Sri Aurobindo

ALMOST all religious and mystical traditions,

East and West, ultimately see the goal of spiritual practice as some kind of vertical liftoff, out of this world into either a transcendent beyond, a heaven, or a final

cessation in *nirvana*. Sri Aurobindo had the audacity to say that this view was a mistake.

A big mistake. He even had the *chutzpah* to say it was a mistake made by Shankara and the Buddha.

English like Robert Powell's classic rendition of Jesus of Nazareth. But take a look behind the scenes at the life of this revolutionary mystic, and you'll find yourself face-to-face with a very different sort of character. You see, the real Sri Aurobindo was no otherworldly ivory tower patriarch, calling out to the lost masses from on high. No, he was a man of action, a fiery wit, a power yogi, a spiritual renegade if there ever was one. In a word, this guy was cool. Really cool. As Michael Murphy, best-selling author, co-founder of Esalen Institute, and a former resident of Sri Aurobindo's ashram, put it: "Aurobindo is a stupendously great guy. He opened up so much. Hardly anyone has this vision that puts the two together—God and the evolving universe. Hardly anyone! Most people in Eastern philosophy take the more traditional view that's represented by Huston Smith or Ram Dass. Which is the classical mystical view that factors in evolution little if at all."

Let me translate. What Mike is saying here is that Sri Aurobindo brought a radical (not in the California sense) new vision to spiritual life that, as far as anyone can tell, no other mystic before him had done. The fact is, with the possible exception of Judaism, almost all religious and mystical traditions, East and West—even if they promote doing good works in the world, chopping wood and carrying water, or being a bodhisattva dedicated to the liberation of all beings—ultimately see the goal of spiritual practice as some kind of vertical liftoff, out of this world into either a transcendent beyond, a heaven, or a final cessation in *nirvana*. Sri Aurobindo had the audacity to say that this view was a mistake. A big mistake. He even had the *chutzpah* to say it was a mistake made by the likes of Shankara and the Buddha. To him, the goal was something much more significant. He said that if

we were only willing to consciously participate in EVOLUTION, we could create a "divine life" right here on earth. No vertical liftoff. No great escape, but a ceaseless, dynamic, miraculous unfolding of ever-higher expressions of harmony and unity, *here in this world*.

And there's more. A lot more. Take poetry. Poetry is cool these days, right? Well, let me tell you, if Sri Aurobindo were alive, he'd take the "poetry slam" to a whole new level. He'd make the beats look like deadbeats. He'd have the rappers running back to grammar school. He published his first poem when he was twelve. His longest poem, *Savitri*, which took him almost thirty-five years to write, is twenty-four thousand lines long. It's his highest example of what he called "future poetry" or "overhead poetry"—poetry written from the highest planes of consciousness. And it's high all right. Good luck digesting more than a few stanzas without going into *samadhi* [ecstatic absorption]. Definitely not to be read while operating heavy machinery. And did I mention that Aldous Huxley, Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck, and others independently nominated Sri Aurobindo for the Nobel Prize in Literature?

Now, being a political revolutionary is seriously cool, right? Well, how about the fact that, after reading a poem by Shelley on the French revolution at the age of eleven (that's right, eleven), Aurobindo decided that he, too, would like to devote his life "to a similar world-change" and lead his then oppressed homeland to freedom. And after finishing a star-studded academic career at Cambridge University while surviving on little more than "toast and tea," he became, by the age of thirty-four, the leading figure in the Indian independence movement. The British even labeled him the "most dangerous

man" in India, and threw him in jail—solitary confinement to be precise—for the better part of a year while he was on trial for his alleged involvement in a terrorist bombing.

But guess what he did in jail. Did he get depressed? No. He meditated. Boy, did he! In fact, it was there, in a barren six-by-nine cell, that he underwent one of the most extraordinary transformations of his remarkable, if not epic, spiritual journey. After a short time, as he tells it, "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was [God] who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was [God], it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw [God]. . . . Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover." So much for solitary confinement.

And while we're on the subject of spiritual breakthroughs, let's take a look at his yoga. And, I'm not talking here about the curvaceous-blond-doing-suptavirasana-by-the-California-seashore-at-sunset *Yoga Journal* calendar kind of yoga. This was yoga in the traditional sense: Seeking union with the Divine through real, disciplined, inward spiritual practice. Meditation and contemplation, as most of us would call it. Now, for Sri Aurobindo, although he was never one to slouch in the face of required effort, the yoga part seemed to come easy. In fact, the very first time he went to a teacher for guidance, he found himself thrust into a state of consciousness many never reach in an entire lifetime of practice. After simply following the instructions of this little-

known yogi to reject any thoughts that tried to enter his mind, he found that "In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free."

And just so we're clear, the "freedom" that he experienced—and continued to experience from that day on—was, in his words, none other than "Nirvana," the "concrete consciousness of stillness and silence" most of us think of as the ground and goal of all true mystical pursuit:

To reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition [in which] there was no ego, no real world . . . no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. . . . What it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom.

But for Sri Aurobindo, the experience did not end there. Although it was "attended at first by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world," his experience eventually began to give way to the recognition of a deeper truth:

The aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. . . . Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned

out to be the beginning of my realization, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. . . . And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self.

In these Buddhistically enlightened days in the West, Sri Aurobindo's claim that *nirvana* is not the end of the path may seem a little strange. After all, doesn't *nirvana* by its very definition mean "the end," the final cessation toward which all of our striving is headed? I mean, sure, if we're really selfless bodhisattvas, we might think about postponing our *nirvana* for a few eons. But we all know where we're going in the end, right? Cessation, release, transcendence, the Beyond.

"I'm not sure you can really assume that about our readers," Elizabeth, one of my colleagues, interrupted. "Granted, most spiritual people don't tend to think of the goal in terms of evolution, but I think people probably have lots of different ideas about where their spiritual practice is taking them. Just look at how many people we've come across doing this issue on evolution who see the goal of the spiritual path as the attainment of physical immortality or the 'light body.'" She turned to the rest of the team.

"She's right," Carter agreed. "In fact, wasn't Sri Aurobindo one of them?"

"Well, yes," I conceded, "I think something like that was at least a part of what he was aiming for. But it definitely wasn't the main event. Shall I keep reading?"

"Did you just say that Sri Aurobindo thought the goal of the spiritual path had something to do with physical immortality and the light body?" Andrew asked.

"Well, I'm not completely clear

on that one yet myself," I admitted. "From what I've read, though, it does seem that he thought that physical immortality would be one of the results of the transformation he was pointing to. I mean, to be honest, he talks a lot about the transformation of the physical body, and I actually don't feel like I understand that part very well yet. But I think the gist of it is that in the course of our further spiritual evolution, as greater divine powers begin to work in us, all limitations, even physical limitations, would eventually be transcended."

"Sounds pretty far out," Carter remarked. "But you said that definitely wasn't the main event. So what, in your mind, was the main event? What's gotten you so fired up about this?"

"Well, I think it's really what I wrote at the beginning—about his ultimate vision of the purpose and goal of the spiritual quest. His idea that we can create a divine life on earth. Actually, this is exactly what I wrote about in the next part of my piece. Here, I'll keep going. I'm skipping ahead a little."

If one is aiming for a spiritual goal beyond or outside of this world, it's easy to keep the nature of that goal pretty nebulous. Words like *nirvana*, or enlightenment, or God-realization, when referring to a lofty or transcendent attainment, can mean, well, just about anything. But when, as in Sri Aurobindo's case, the goal of the spiritual path becomes about something that must happen in *this* world, the options start to narrow, and the target quickly starts to define itself. And for Sri Aurobindo that target was dead clear. It was nothing less than the total transformation of the human being on every level. Through the dedicated practice of what he called "Integral Yoga," or yoga that addresses every aspect of life, he felt that human beings could

purify themselves of all negative, egoic tendencies and in so doing become ultimately perfect and stainless vehicles for the expression of the "divine consciousness" in this world. This, to him, was the evolutionary leap toward which all of humanity's highest aspirations are pointing.

For Sri Aurobindo, however, to consider this extraordinary transformation as simply a further stage in human evolution was by no means enough to do justice to the level of change he was envisioning. To him, such a radical transformation of consciousness, and of life, could only accurately be described as the birth of an entirely new type of being—a life-form that he referred to variously as "the Gnostic being" or "supramental being" or sometimes simply "the superman."

Now, if the idea of a new type of being coming into existence has you wondering how you ended up in the sci-fi section, I can only assure you that, at least as far as I can tell, Sri Aurobindo is not suggesting that we will learn to fly, develop an intense aversion to kryptonite, or acquire x-ray vision anytime soon. What he is suggesting, however, is that if the next grand step in evolution is indeed the manifestation of a divine life on earth, and if the radical transformation of human nature itself is indeed the means toward that end, then the goal that Nature is currently reaching toward does seem to be none other than the emergence of what will in some fundamental sense be a completely new type of being. A being in whom, as he puts it:

There could be . . . no place for . . . the satisfaction or frustration of the limited self . . . no place for the relative and dependent happiness and grief that visit and afflict our limited nature; for these are things that belong to the ego and the

**"IN A MOMENT
my
mind
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silent
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on a high mountain
summit and then I saw
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another coming
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I flung them away
before they could enter
and take hold of the brain
and in three days
I was free."**

Sri Aurobindo

*Ignorance, not to the freedom
and truth of the Spirit.*

Having wholly transcended the narrow, self-centered motivations of the ego and having been illumined by the light and truth of the highest levels of consciousness, this "Gnostic being" would truly be a pure vessel through which the Divine, in all its glory, could manifest itself freely in this world:

*One in self with all, the supra-
mental being will seek the de-
light of self-manifestation of the
Spirit in himself but equally the
delight of the Divine in all: he
will have the cosmic joy and will
be a power for bringing the bliss
of the Spirit, the joy of being to
others; for their joy will be part
of his own joy of existence.*

"Isn't that beautiful?" I erupted. "This is what I'm so excited about. This is it! This is the whole point: That we have the potential to become truly God-inspired, God-motivated beings living a life completely beyond the ego. I mean we all see the potential for this, right? We see it in each other when we're at our best. And we know this is why we're here—to make this happen. Why else would we be here? Anyway, I know I'm preaching to the choir, but it just hit me again as I was reading that last quote how completely extraordinary what he's pointing to really is.

"In terms of the piece, this is as far as I've written, but the next point I want to make is about the collective aspect of his vision. Because that's really where it's all leading, in the end. It's what he devotes most of the last chapter of *The Life Divine* to speaking about. He basically says that for the divine life to truly manifest, it's not enough for a few highly evolved individuals to just kind of be around transmitting love and light to everybody

else. He's saying that what has to happen is for a group of 'gnostic beings' to come together and begin to manifest a completely different kind of collective life. He writes about this in incredible detail, too. He describes how, when a group of egoless beings come together in the knowledge of their absolute unity with one another and with the whole, then completely different rules apply; all the structures and institutions and modes of relating and responding, individually and collectively, become informed by what he called the 'Truth-Consciousness' or 'supramental consciousness' and the result is really nothing less than a completely 'new world.' See, this is what I mean. No one else has written about all this. I mean, does anybody even *know* about this? Do you see why I want to do this piece?"

Andrew threw up his hands. "Okay, okay, you've convinced me. You're right, we need to do something on Sri Aurobindo for this issue. So when do you leave for India?"

"Wait—before we finish," Carter jumped in, "I just want to make sure I have the story straight. Because you said he had all these big experiences while he was busy leading the revolution. But he didn't just keep leading the revolution in the midst of this unfolding revelation, did he? You'd think the spiritual life would have eventually pulled him away from all that."

"Well, believe it or not, he did keep leading it for quite a while, even after those experiences. Even while he was in the midst of that big, ongoing experience of *nirvana* I mentioned, he visited a bomb factory and he gave something like fifteen political speeches. People said they were the best speeches he ever gave. He did eventually pull out of the revolution, though. In 1910, he heard the British were going to arrest him again, so he fled Calcutta, eventually

ending up in Pondicherry, a French colony that was offering asylum to the freedom fighters. It seems like what happened there was that he got so fired up about this revolutionary spiritual vision he was discovering that he just lost interest in fighting the political revolution. He stayed there in Pondicherry, until the end of his life, doing his own spiritual practice, guiding other people in theirs, and putting his teachings of Integral Yoga into writing."

"It's quite a story," Amy said. "The more you hear, the harder it is to believe this was all one guy."

"Yeah, and I have a feeling there's a lot more where that came from," I replied. "That's why it'll be great to go and visit the ashram. Did you know they actually refer to it as a 'laboratory of evolution'? There are sixteen hundred people living there, some of whom have been around since the early days. I'm sure they're going to have a lot to say about Sri Aurobindo and Integral Yoga and, with any luck, about evolution as well."

The Mother

For most of us, the mention of an Indian ashram does not exactly bring to mind a dynamic picture. We probably think of bearded, orange-robed swamis sitting before statues of Hindu gods and goddesses chanting mantras; early-morning gatherings for meditation and *bhajan* singing; a quiet, simple, contemplative sort of life. But step through the gates of Sri Aurobindo Ashram and you're in for a very different kind of ride. In fact, arriving in the ashram on a sunny November morning, I found no inward-turning swamis, but energetic men, women, boys, and girls, young and old, dressed not in ochre robes but in polo shirts—and khaki shorts! Now, if you've never traveled

in India, the fact that everyone was wearing shorts at an ashram might not mean much. But to anyone who has dragged a backpack around this socially conservative country, it is all but incomprehensible. Any travel guide worth the price of the paper it's printed on will tell you flat out: Unless you're hell-bent on offending the locals, *don't wear shorts*. What gives with the shorts? I wondered.

A visit with ashram reception, my first stop of the day, soon got me my answer. "The idea of wearing shorts came from the Mother," the man behind the desk informed me. "She instituted this back in the early forties. It was a very controversial step at the time, but now it is quite acceptable throughout the town. The Mother was a real pioneer, you know. She has left her mark in every field of life. Do you know much about her?"

"I've read some of her books," I replied. But given that her pictures seemed to take up more ashram wall space than even Sri Aurobindo's, I realized I was probably going to be learning a whole lot more about her over the next couple of days.

Not to be confused with *his* mother, *the* Mother, I would learn, was a French painter and musician named Mirra Richard, who showed up on Sri Aurobindo's doorstep in 1914 only to recognize that he was the spiritual teacher who had been appearing to her in visions since her early teens. Mirra was a highly accomplished occultist who had, by her own account, been "doing yoga" since she was four and soaring out of her body by night for most of her life. She had studied with some big occult leaders in Algeria and had led esoteric study groups in Paris with attendees as prestigious as the illustrious Tibetologist Alexandra David-Neel. A painter and member

of Paris's artistic elite, mixing with the likes of Rodin and Matisse during her early years, she was an extraordinarily cultured woman.

Now when most of us hear the word "occult," we probably think of séances, spells, Ouija boards, and other mysterious, slightly spooky things happening in candle-lit rooms. And while the Mother no doubt participated in her fair share of those, her real occult calling was of a considerably different order. Her various "missions on earth" included such formidable tasks as vanquishing or "converting" the four great *asuras*, or demonic forces, that hold the world in their grip (one of whom she conveniently managed to marry). Moreover, she had known from an early age that she also had a task in front of her that could only be called "spiritual" in nature. As she tells it, "Between [the ages of] eleven and thirteen a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man's possibility of uniting with Him, of realizing Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine." No surprise, then, that when she finally met Sri Aurobindo in the flesh, the impact struck deep. As she wrote the next day in her diary, "It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth."

Mirra's first visit to the ashram, however, ended abruptly after a year, when World War I broke out and she departed with her husband, who was called back to France to serve. But when she returned to India for good in 1920, Sri Aurobindo apparently soon recognized her extraordinary

spiritual capacities and before long began to relate to her as a sort of confidante and collaborator in his work. Impressed by her remarkable proclivity for the practical, within a few years he gave her free rein to plan, build, and run his growing ashram, ultimately even putting her in charge of providing personal spiritual guidance to the disciples. And run it she did. As Michael Murphy, who knew her personally, would tell me later: "She kicked ass. She really kicked ass. She was a strong personality. She was shrewd. She was a real builder, a businessperson, extremely able. And she was spiritually realized. She ran a tight ship." In fact, I would learn, during the fifty-three years she lived at the ashram, it was the Mother's influence, much more even than Sri Aurobindo's, that was the guiding force in the growth and development of this burgeoning spiritual community, and of the work of Integral Yoga as a whole.

In the course of my first day at the ashram, thanks to the help of a couple of veteran ashramites who volunteered to show me around, I had the chance to speak with a broad range of people about the powerful role this unlikely guru from Paris played, and continues to play, in their lives. Later that evening, my head spinning from everything I had heard, I joined the community meditation. I had barely begun to sink in when my cell phone rang. "Damn. I can't believe I forgot to turn it off!" I cursed myself while running tiptoe through the mass of silent meditators, trying to get to the gate before the next ring.

"Guess who?" It was Andrew and my colleagues in chorus on the speakerphone. "What's happening in the laboratory?"

"Well," I answered, not sure where to begin, "it's a lot to take in. The people are all really nice, and they have been extremely helpful.



THE supermind is not a sort of passive divine state of being.

It is an immense, conscious, unifying power, which contains an unimaginable transformative potential. Sri Aurobindo felt that this power, if it could be

"brought down" into the physical world, could transform life as we know it.

And, from what I can tell, pretty much all of them seem deeply devoted."

"To evolution?" Carter asked.

"Well, I think so, at least some of them," I answered. "But what's ten times more apparent is their devotion to the Mother."

"The Mother?" They sounded dumbfounded.

"Yeah. I had no idea what a huge role she played here either. I mean, from the look of things, they're much more devoted to her than they are even to Sri Aurobindo."

"Could that just be because she was there for twenty years after he died, so people had more contact with her?" Amy suggested.

"I think that was probably part of it, but there's more to it. You see, Sri Aurobindo apparently told everyone that devotion and surrender to her, as the Divine Mother on earth, was the most crucial part of the path."

"It sounds like she was really seen as a powerful spiritual master in her own right," Elizabeth commented.

"There's no question about it. In fact, Sri Aurobindo even said that he and the Mother were 'one consciousness.' And everyone here is convinced that both of them are avatars who descended from heaven to bring down the 'supramental consciousness,' or actually that the two of them put together make up a single avatar, or something like that. It's a little confusing. But the one thing I can say is that the way people speak about what it was like to be with her, it's obvious that she touched them really deeply. I don't know where else I've seen such intense devotion."

"I wonder why we didn't know more about the Mother's influence," Elizabeth said. "Could there have been some major hole in your research?"

"Well, maybe," I responded, "but Georges Van Vrekhem, who

has written biographies of both of them, told me today that hardly anyone in America takes any notice of the Mother. I'm not sure why."

"Well, it sounds like an adventure in the making," Andrew concluded. "It'll be great to hear where things are at in a day or two."

Integral Yoga

Having spent nearly my whole first day getting a crash course on the Mother, by my second afternoon I was ready to get back to Sri Aurobindo. Reading about his extraordinary life had been one thing. But now, finally, I was going to get a chance to meet someone who had actually known him. Well, sort of. My appointment that afternoon was with a man Sri Aurobindo had named Amal Kiran, or "the Clear Ray," a widely loved and highly respected poet, author, and cultural critic more commonly known as K. D. Sethna, who had moved to the ashram in 1927. Having arrived on the scene when there were still only a handful of disciples, one would naturally assume that Amal would have had a close personal relationship with the Master. So when he told me that he had never actually heard Sri Aurobindo's voice, I was slightly taken aback. Until I remembered reading that Sri Aurobindo withdrew into seclusion in 1926, and after that, no one except the Mother, the occasional visiting V.I.P., and a handful of physicians who helped him recover after an injury had heard his voice. In those days, if you wanted to have a relationship with Sri Aurobindo beyond the thrice-yearly *darshans* [audiences with the Master], there was only one way to do it. You wrote letters to him. And, at least most of the time, he wrote back. Amal, I would learn, had been one of the ones who wrote the

most. In fact, being a poet of high repute himself, he had the good fortune to enter into an ongoing correspondence with Sri Aurobindo about the creation of the Master's epic poem, *Savitri*. And Amal, with Sri Aurobindo's help, had also cultivated the art of writing "overhead poetry," although, as he would confess, he hadn't quite been able to write from the very highest planes of consciousness.

Now ninety-seven, Amal was, without a doubt, the most radiant presence I would meet during my time there. Realizing at the outset that I was talking with someone who had been doing Integral Yoga for seventy-five years, I didn't waste time on history or philosophy. What is the essence of the practice? I wanted to know. Amal didn't hesitate for a second.

"This path has to be approached in a spirit of complete spiritual self-surrender," he explained. "It is not an individual achievement, but a lending of oneself to what the Supreme Divine wants. And in the daily functions, remember the Divine, and offer yourself to the Divine. And along that path of self-giving, it is the Divine who will decide how far you will go. One must approach the Divine with a spirit that says: 'Whatever You want, do. Make me what You want me to be, and not what I might dream of being.' The yoga has to be in that spirit."

Over the course of my conversation with Amal that afternoon, which ranged widely across the territory of Integral Yoga, for the first time I began to get a sense of how much it really takes to practice this comprehensive path that Sri Aurobindo had deemed "more difficult than any other."

My talk with Amal had run right through the ashram dinner

hour, and desperate for some Western food, I took my chances at one of the Italian restaurants along the oceanfront. Halfway through one of the wateriest plates of fettuccine I've ever encountered, my phone rang again. Sure enough, it was the home team.

"I'm meeting some incredible people," I started off. "Remember K. D. Sethna, or Amal Kiran—the famous Indian writer I told you about who was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and who had that long-standing correspondence with Father Bede Griffiths, the revered Christian *sannyasin*? We spent an hour together this afternoon, and he was beautiful. Ninety-seven years old, more or less immobilized in a wheelchair at the ashram nursing home, but totally present, awake, sharp as a razor, and radiating something extraordinary. I mean, the presence in the room by the end of our talk was profound."

"What did you talk about?" Elizabeth asked.

"Integral Yoga. I think I'm getting a better handle on it. You know how we've never been able to quite get what Integral Yoga was?"

"Yeah," they responded.

"Well, I think it's because we were trying to find some sort of list of practices. But there isn't one."

"Yoga without practice? It must be easy to get people to sign up for that!" Andrew joked.

"No, it's not that they don't *do* practices. I think pretty much everybody does some sort of practice, be it meditation or mantra or contemplation or what have you. But the point is that it's not about the practices *per se*. It's about a whole orientation toward life. Sri Aurobindo's goal was to bring about the total transformation of the human being on every level, and likewise the transformation of life as a whole, so he created what he called 'a

world-changing or Nature-changing yoga,' an approach to the spiritual path that could be applied to every aspect of life."

"What does that mean practically?" Amy wanted to know.

"Well, as I understand it, Integral Yoga is basically a set of principles to guide one all the time, in every circumstance. I mean, he's written about it in various ways, and there are many dimensions to it, but in its essence, it's actually simple. It comes down to three things, which he called *aspiration, rejection, and surrender*. So first, you have to aspire one-pointedly to realize the Divine with your whole being. And although this aspiration can start as simply a mental act of will and intention, it ultimately has to come from a much deeper place, from your own soul's longing for that divine perfection. Then, when he speaks of rejection, he's saying that you have to reject anything that arises within you or outside of you that would obstruct the fulfillment of your aspiration. Granted, at first the subtlety of what to reject and what not to reject might not be so obvious. But if your aspiration is genuine, you will fairly quickly come to a place where it's easy to see directly what is a help and what is a hindrance. And then your aspiration is tested because you have to be willing to make the right choice."

"So where does surrender fit into the equation?" Carter asked.

"Well, according to him, surrender is the most important of the three. Because the whole point of Integral Yoga, in the end, is to become a pure vehicle so that a Higher Force can take over and begin to live in you and through you. He's very precise on this point. He says it's not enough to want to open yourself up to the Divine Power, to want to experience its glory. You have to want to become

"THIS path has to be approached

in a spirit of complete spiritual self-surrender.

It is not an individual achievement, but a lending of oneself to what the Supreme Divine wants.

One must approach the Divine with a spirit that says: 'Whatever you want, do. Make Me what You want me to be, and not what I might dream of being.'"

Amal Kiran

continued on p. 152

... IN

MISSING



Have you seen this man?

name: Babaji *age:* immortal

occupation: yogi, mahavatar

appearance: usually 16 year old youth with long black hair

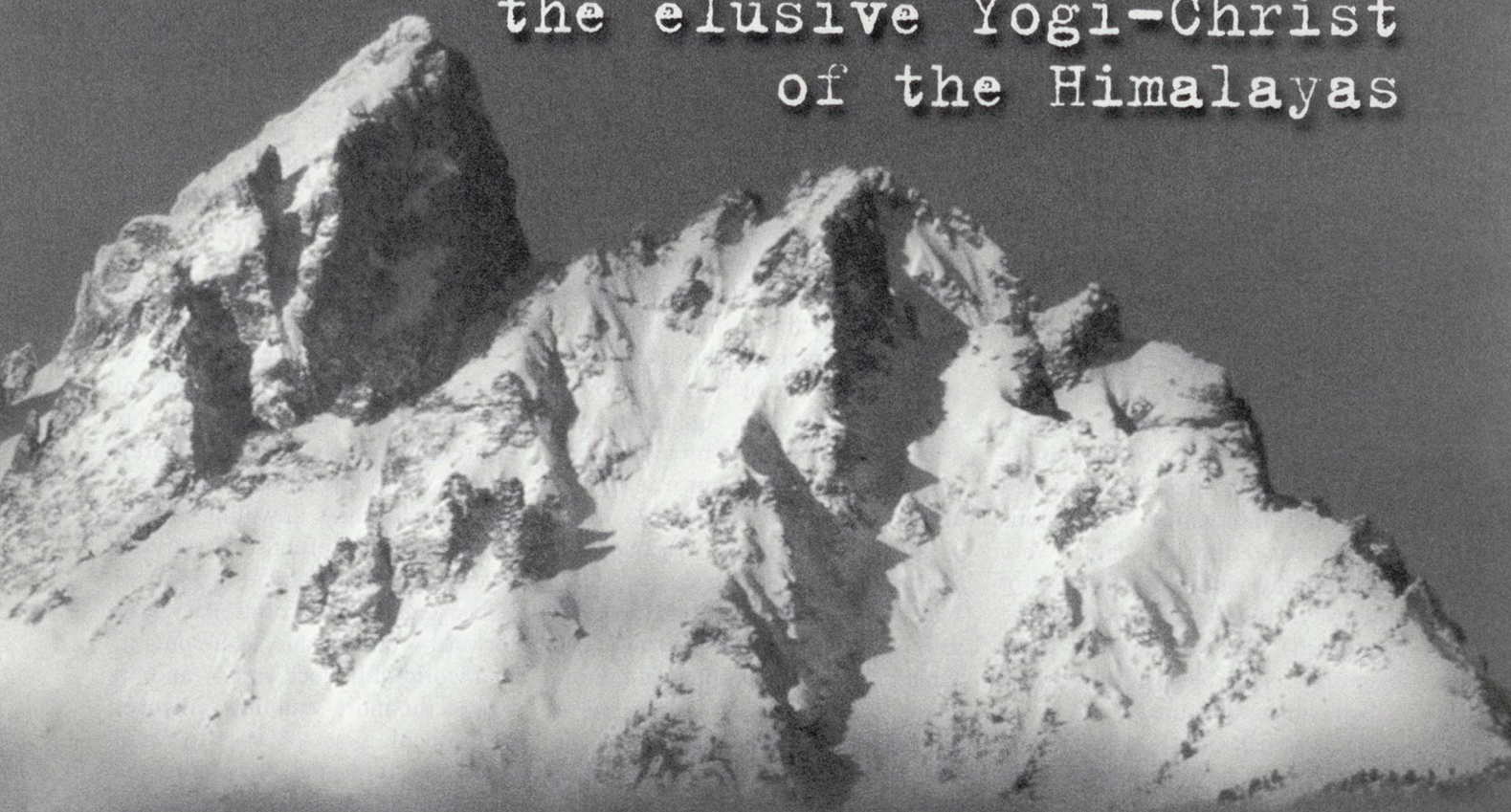
Last seen in the high Himalayas of northern India

Please contact: *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine

Report by
Carter Phipps

SEARCH of BABAJI

WIE tracks down
the elusive Yogi-Christ
of the Himalayas



"BABAJI HAS BEEN CHOSEN by God to remain in his body for the duration of this particular world cycle. Ages will come and go — still the deathless master, beholding the drama of the centuries, shall be present on this stage terrestrial." So began the legend of the immortal sage Babaji. These words were published in 1946, in the classic spiritual tale *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda—a book that was destined to have a major impact on the then just emerging East-West spiritual dialogue. It was a book that introduced thousands, if not millions, of aspiring seekers in the Western world to a

man who, legend tells us, is perhaps the greatest of ancient saints, an immortal deathless yogi of India watching over this earthly plane like a benevolent omniscient spiritual parent—Babaji.

To read *Autobiography of a Yogi* and absorb Yogananda's lucid, almost otherworldly descriptions of the spiritual life is to embark upon a journey to a place that exists far beyond the borders of our materialistic Western worldview—a realm where miracles are commonplace and where physical laws, in the hands of the great yogis, seem as malleable and as changeable as clay in the hands of great artists. By

any standard, the book is a work of genius, a masterpiece that combines an inspiring introduction to the ancient yogic path with a philosophical inquiry into the underlying unity of Eastern and Western religions, weaving it all together with the remarkable story of Yogananda's own pioneering life and teachings. Upon publication it captured the hearts of thousands and introduced Americans to the esoteric world of the Himalayan sages, inviting hungry spirits to believe in undreamed-of possibilities in the evolution of consciousness—possibilities, the yogic masters say, that lie dormant in each

of us. But perhaps even more importantly, the book revealed the existence of a heretofore unknown Master residing in the Himalayas, an immortal sage offering *darshan* [audience with a Master] to a select few, a major player in human evolution hiding in obscurity amid the high peaks of Asia and guiding the unfolding drama of spiritual history—Babaji.

So who exactly is Babaji? My own inquiry into that question was sparked last year by a couple of books we received in the mail from individuals who claimed to have been personally initiated by the great Master himself. Although I was only marginally familiar with the history of this legendary yogi, as recounted by Yogananda, I knew enough to appreciate the magnitude of such a claim, and the books led to several fascinating discussions among our editorial team. Were we suddenly witnessing a surge of interest in this legendary saint, we wondered? The popularity of *Autobiography of a Yogi* has long made Babaji's name and image pop icons of the spiritual counterculture—one only needs to see his serene countenance floating above the crowd on the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* album cover to appreciate that. But it did seem, almost half a century after Yogananda's death, that Babaji's presence in the spiritual world was on the rise. And the more we looked the more we found. From Himalayan caves to California communes, we began to see that Babaji's influence, in some form or another, was surprisingly pervasive. Books were being written about him, workshops were representing his teachings, people were channeling him, communities were dedicated to him, individuals were claiming to be his personal disciples, individuals were even claiming to be Babaji himself. This obscure, secluded, behind-the-

scenes immortal sage seemed to be, in his multitudinous modern incarnations, rapidly losing his obscurity.

As we began to explore the subject of spiritual evolution for this issue of *WIE*, the phenomenon of Babaji became even more compelling. Some were saying that his enlightenment was a step beyond even that of the Buddha, a total transformation of consciousness, the powerful effects of which produce radical changes all the way down to the very cells of the physical body. And Yogananda's declaration of Babaji's physical immortality had not fallen on deaf ears either. Indeed, the subject of immortality, bolstered perhaps by this impressive endorsement, seemed to have moved out beyond the New Age fringe and was being embraced by a growing number of seekers as our true collective evolutionary destiny. So what really was going on? Yogananda's story had lit the fuse over fifty years ago, and the reverberations from the explosion of interest in this legendary sage and his spiritual attainment had definitely taken on a life of their own. But did any of it have anything to do with the real Babaji? For that matter, did a real Babaji even exist? For this issue of *WIE* we decided to take up the challenge and go in search of this immortal sage, whose very existence, it seemed, would say a lot about enlightenment, evolution, and the future of God.

For those few seekers who have never cracked the covers of Yogananda's classic tale, the story goes something like this: In the middle of the nineteenth century, Babaji, the immortal "Yogi-Christ" of India as Yogananda called him, appeared in person to a postal worker by the name of Lahiri Mahasaya who was stationed in the high Himalayas. In a series of extraordinary and fantastical encounters with this

Himalayan sage, Lahiri was initiated into the practice of Kriya yoga, an ancient yogic method, we are told, that was taught by Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita and is referred to by the great yogic pioneer Patanjali in his classic Yoga Sutras. The technique had been lost for centuries before being "rediscovered and clarified" in modern times by Babaji. Kriya yoga is described by Yogananda as an "instrument through which human evolution can be quickened." And he writes that through applying this powerful method of breath mastery, we quickly deepen our connection with the Divine, and our brain, spinal cord, and cells become rejuvenated. Ultimately, in the highest levels of Kriya practice, Yogananda says, our entire body can be transmuted into energy. Appealing perhaps to a Western consciousness unwilling to wait lifetimes for the promise of spiritual awakening, Yogananda introduces Kriya yoga as an evolutionary leap forward—an airplane, as he puts it, in a world of bullock carts—and, in one of the more stunning sentences of the book, goes as far as to claim that one thousand Kriya breaths practiced in eight and a half hours can give the sincere yogi, in one day, "the equivalent of one thousand years of natural evolution."

It was this technique of Kriya yoga, streamlined and updated for the modern age, that Babaji asked Lahiri Mahasaya to bring to Indian seekers of truth. And, in contrast to past restrictions, he allowed Lahiri to initiate not only ascetics, world-renouncers, but all interested householders, regardless of station or religion. Teaching in Benares, India, at the end of the nineteenth century, Lahiri helped establish a spiritual lineage that was destined to become one of the most significant in the modern age. The next teacher in this celebrated lineage

would be Sri Yukteswar, a serious young student of Lahiri's who would, in his years with his master, also have several miraculous encounters with Babaji. In one of those meetings Yukteswar was informed by the great yogi that a young man would eventually be sent to him for instruction, an Indian seeker who was to be trained for a great destiny—to disseminate the Kriya yoga teachings in the Western world.

Babaji's words proved prescient.

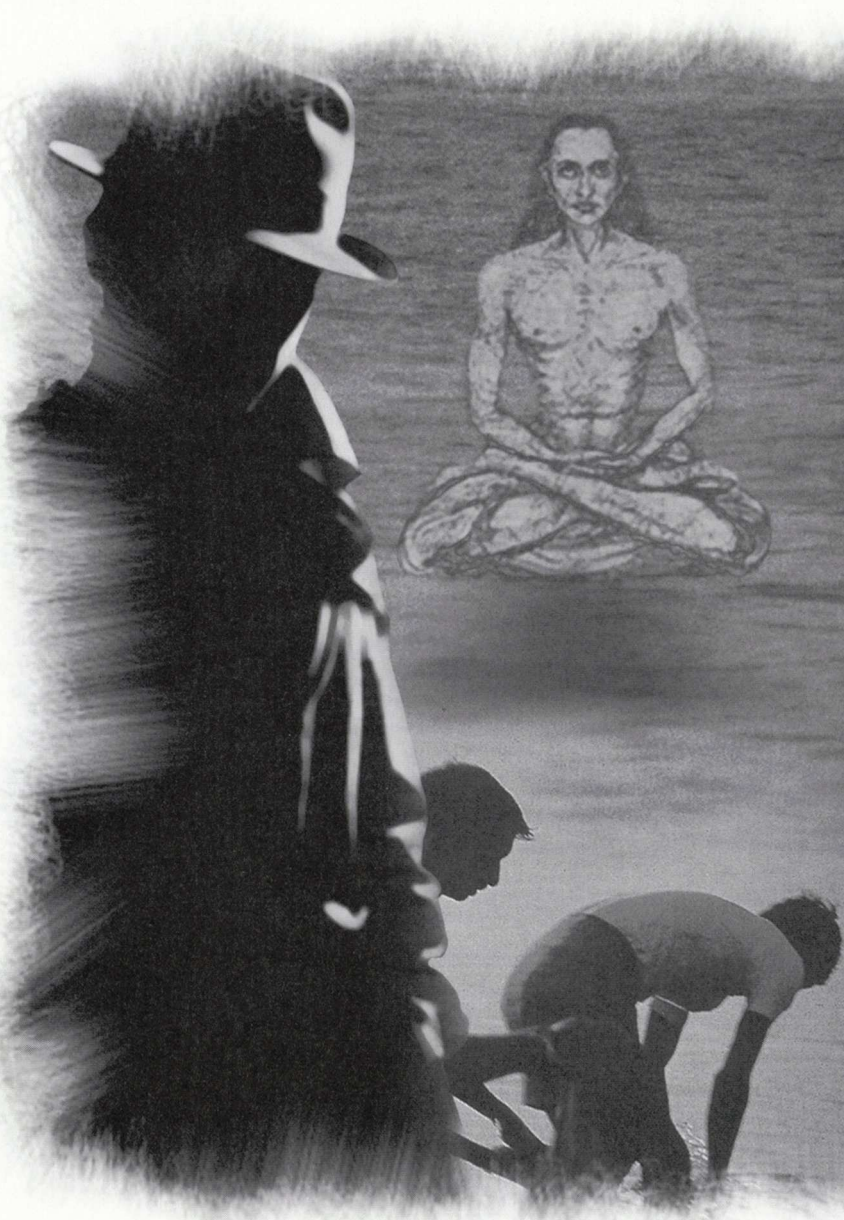
A student named Mukunda eventually arrived and requested Yukteswar's spiritual guidance, a passionate young man whom Yukteswar took as a disciple and began to prepare for the prophesied mission. Taking to the yogic path like a fish to water, Mukunda advanced rapidly under Yukteswar's strict tutelage and, after a number of years of living in his Master's hermitage, was ready to take up the Kriya yoga banner and head to the West. The arrival in America of this gifted

young Indian man, educated in a Calcutta university and trained in Kriya yoga by Sri Yukteswar, was a watershed event in the development of Western spirituality. People turned out in droves to see this extraordinary yogi who had walked among the great God-realized sages of India and who was sharing his wisdom in the New World. Swami Yogananda, as he was now known, became a legend in his own time, the teaching of Kriya yoga spread fast among Western seekers, and the

Glimpses of Babaji

I was on the shore of the Ganges washing my clothes and thinking of the stories I had heard about Babaji. The stories had made such a strong impression on me that I had been meditating on Babaji, hoping that I might also be granted a meeting with him. I felt a special affinity for him. As I was washing, I became aware of someone beside me. I looked up and saw an old man who had his head twisted to one side in a curious fashion, as though he did not want me to get a full view of his face. He took over the washing from me, with no objection on my part. Later, when I thought about the incident, I realized it was quite peculiar to allow a stranger to take over a job like that from me. He asked what I was doing in India and what I had come in search of. I answered his questions but I had the distinct impression that he knew the answers before I spoke to him. I asked him who he was and he answered, "The one you are looking for." "Babaji?" I questioned. As I watched, I saw him begin to drift out over the water and up into the air.

*Swami Radha
founder of the Yasodhara Ashram Society
from The Divine Light Invocation*



stories of the immortal sage Babaji, who seemed to have reached the pinnacle of human evolution, enthralled generations of Westerners, who soon placed *Autobiography of a Yogi* near the top of the modern spiritual canon.

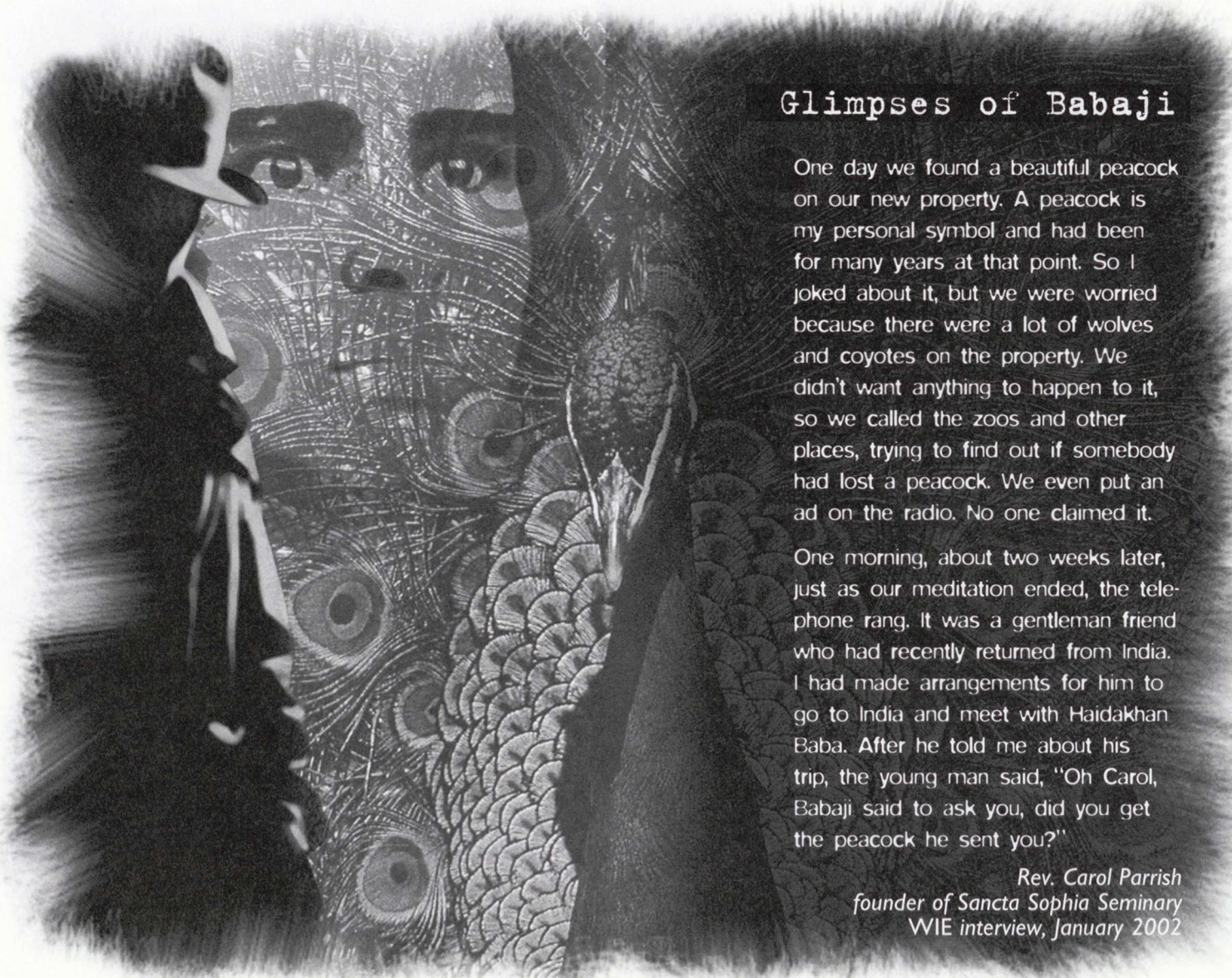
The Monk and the Avatar

The word “avatar” in Indian philosophy refers to the appearance in the world of a deity in human form. It is an Indian term traditionally reserved for showing great respect

to extraordinary human beings who bless us with their presence on this earth. But today, in a spiritual world where it sometimes seems as if you can’t throw a stone fifty feet without hitting yet another self-declared avatar, one has to appreciate Yogananda’s foresight in distinguishing Babaji as nothing less than a *Mahavatar*. Qualifying for this much greater “scriptural classification,” as Yogananda called it in his book, is apparently no small matter. Swami Satyananda, a long-time monk of the Self-Realization Fel-

lowship (SRF), the organization Yogananda designated to carry on his teachings after his death, explained the distinction to me last November.

“Throughout human evolution we’re evolving physically, but we’re also evolving spiritually. And the pinnacle of spiritual evolution is a cosmic consciousness that unites our awareness with all three worlds [physical, causal, astral], and beyond. At that point, we have the power to consciously leave our bodies and tran-



Glimpses of Babaji

One day we found a beautiful peacock on our new property. A peacock is my personal symbol and had been for many years at that point. So I joked about it, but we were worried because there were a lot of wolves and coyotes on the property. We didn’t want anything to happen to it, so we called the zoos and other places, trying to find out if somebody had lost a peacock. We even put an ad on the radio. No one claimed it.

One morning, about two weeks later, just as our meditation ended, the telephone rang. It was a gentleman friend who had recently returned from India. I had made arrangements for him to go to India and meet with Haidakhan Baba. After he told me about his trip, the young man said, “Oh Carol, Babaji said to ask you, did you get the peacock he sent you?”

Rev. Carol Parrish
founder of Sancta Sophia Seminary
WIE interview, January 2002

scend this material world. But if we then come back for the purpose of helping others spiritually, and yet we ourselves have no more karma, at that point we are an avatar. Paramahansa Yogananda said that he himself was an avatar because he came back for that purpose. *Mahavatar* Babaji would be an avatar who attained that status long ago and has received a dispensation from Cosmic Spirit to remain incarnate, that is, in a form on earth, but in a hidden way, for the purpose of helping the spirituality of mankind."

In my talks with Satyananda, it was clear that he was convinced that the words of his Guru regarding Babaji were entirely factual. Leading me on a brief tour of the world of Babaji according to Yogananda and the SRF, he corrected some common misperceptions regarding the legend of the immortal yogi, including the notion that spiritual enlightenment and evolution is leading us all to an eventual state of physical immortality.

"Once we have attained liberation, cosmic consciousness, all things are possible. But it would not be the ultimate goal to then retain a human body for the purpose of living forever. Actually, the Vedic scriptures tell us that there are three bodies. We have the physical body, we have an astral body of energy and light, and we have a causal body of consciousness. So the ultimate goal of evolution has always been, and will always be, to be free of all bodies."

"Including the physical?"

"Including the physical. It would not be the apotheosis of incarnations to remain immortal in the physical body."

"Do you mean that our ultimate evolutionary destiny is not really as

a human in a body on this planet?" "That's right. It would be pure cosmic consciousness. The idea of an avatar coming back to retain a body for an indefinite period of time is the unique role of Babaji."

So Babaji was the exception rather than the rule of evolution, according to Satyananda, and our most likely evolutionary destiny lay far beyond this world.

What about Satyananda himself? I wondered. "Have you ever met Babaji, had a vision, felt his presence?"

"I've had an experience with Babaji. It was a very powerful personal perception that made it clear beyond a doubt that not only is he a spiritual presence in the world, but that there's a unity between him and my group [SRF]. The experience was unsought, but deeply, deeply needed, and left a lifelong imprint. But I don't really want to put it into print. I'm sure you respect and appreciate that."

Understanding his reluctance, I also found myself wondering if his experience had occurred in the physical realm. Indeed, did people today ever see Babaji's physical body? Would I have to travel all the way to the Himalayas to have that opportunity?

The Southern Gentleman

"You have to make contact with Babaji on the inner planes," the voice on the other end of the line told me. "Yogananda, Yukteswar, and Lahiri all encouraged their devotees not to go to the Himalayas in search of Babaji but to find him on the inner planes in deep meditation and contemplation." The gentle Southern accent belonged to one of the few surviving teachers of Kriya

yoga who can genuinely claim to have studied with Yogananda and been authorized to guide others on the path—Roy Eugene Davis. A seventy-one-year-old Southern gentleman with a sweet conversational style and an obvious devotion to his teacher, Davis met Yogananda over fifty years ago and caught fire with a passion for the yogic path to enlightenment. And even though I initially felt slightly uncomfortable asking him questions like, "Are you convinced that Yogananda did actually intend everything he wrote about Babaji to be taken as fact?" Davis's relaxed manner quickly put me at ease. It was clear that, for Davis, the traditional idea of enlightenment is one glorious step along the way to an even more glorious possibility that Babaji represents as the pinnacle of human evolution. He told me:

"If what Yogananda says is true, and I believe it, Babaji is an accomplished Siddha, a Master of the elements. He can materialize his body, and he is in a permanent super-conscious state. I would say that's sort of the peak experience that we can aspire to. I think the potential is in all of us for that."

Davis, in his unassuming manner, was more candid than many, particularly about what he did not know. Never straying far from his own experience, he was not inclined to speculation, and when I pressed him for more about the real nature of Babaji's attainment, he finally said simply, "I have never seen him."

After spending weeks immersed in a subject that is so imbued with the mysterious, Davis's frankness and honesty came as a relief. Especially as it was becoming clear to me that while Yogananda's exalted reputation and respected authority in

the spiritual world had convinced many of the truth of Babaji's existence—especially those connected to his own lineage—actual encounters with the great yogi were rare, and the flesh-and-blood variety almost nonexistent. Was it simply not Babaji's currently preferred method of manifestation? Perhaps. But it was somewhat curious, I thought, that physical encounters with the great yogi seem to get progressively more scarce as one moves forward in history from the date of Lahiri Mahasaya's first meeting with Babaji. It is, without a doubt, always a good idea to make a lot of room in the spiritual life for that which lies beyond the rational mind, and the phenomenon of Babaji may indeed be a prime example. But I had also heard that some highly respected figures in the yoga scene have long suspected that many of the more remarkable stories in *Autobiography of a Yogi* were embellished, if not entirely imagined. Even Roy Davis himself seemed unwilling to declare that the entire book was factual, saying that while Yogananda was no doubt telling the truth, much of the content consisted of reports of anecdotes he had been told and had taken on faith. As questions began to swirl in my mind, the philosophical implications of the issue suddenly struck home. On one hand, if you believe in an immortal sage named Babaji, you are inherently making a strong statement about the reality of immortality and other miraculous powers of mind and consciousness. And on the other hand, if you tend toward skepticism, you are calling into question the authenticity of a sacred icon whom respected authorities in the modern spiritual world revere as a symbol of perfect divinity. While Davis's words stayed with me—"I have not met anyone here or in India who has seen him in recent

years"—my search was far from finished, and I was soon to meet several people with very different stories to tell.

A Different Lineage

Sightings and stories of Babaji have never been the exclusive domain of the lineage begun by Lahiri Mahasaya in the nineteenth century. In some ways, one could say it is almost *de rigueur* if you are a North Indian yogi to have had a Babaji encounter. Famous figures in the yoga scene such as Baba Hari Dass, Swami Radha, and Yogi Bhaerendra have all passed on anecdotes of Babaji encounters over the years, although most were brief and did not involve any kind of initiation or transmission of the lineage. One exception to this rule occurred in the early 1950s, shortly after Yogananda's death, when Babaji is said to have initiated and empowered two Indian seekers to spread his teaching of Kriya yoga: S.A.A. Ramaiah and V.T. Neelakantan. Ramaiah was a young university student in Madras, India, when a series of miraculous events convinced him of Babaji's living presence in his life. And Neelakantan was a famous Indian journalist, already steeped in esoteric knowledge through his friendship with Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society when Babaji began to make regular appearances to him. When the two met in 1952, a new Kriya yoga lineage was born and, although their partnership did not last long, it was productive. They published several books allegedly dictated by Babaji, and Ramaiah began a long study of a relatively unknown ancient order of yogis called the Siddha yogis, a South Indian tradition that thrived in the ancient Tamil culture. It seems that many of these historical Siddhas—a term used for great

saints who have mastered certain yogic powers or *siddhis*—were not quite as interested in traditional conceptions of yogic Samadhi as they were in something a little more down-to-earth—the evolution of the body. They envisioned radical physical transformation as a crucial part of the spiritual and evolutionary process. In their work and writings, the holy grail of immortality found perhaps its greatest champions.

The best way to describe Yogi Ramaiah, at least from my brief exchanges with him, would be to say that he is dedicated. Overseeing centers supporting the work of Babaji and Kriya yoga all around the world, from America to South Africa to India, he maintains a personal schedule that is, according to reports from exhausted students, near-Herculean. He is constantly circling the globe teaching, leading retreats, organizing conferences, and sharing his knowledge of the Siddha yoga tradition even as he continues to supervise the construction of a major new hospital and medical college in South India. Our conversation took place from one until two o'clock in the morning, one of the few times he was available to speak. Ramaiah is a passionate believer in the yogic path as envisioned by the Siddha sages, and all I had to do was mention the term "evolution" and that was the last word I got in for more than half an hour.

"According to the theory of evolution, the highest level of development is human beings. But according to yoga, that is not so. According to the Tamil Siddhantam, or the teachings of the Siddhas, something greater is happening. No doubt we are the most advanced physically, nobody is denying it. But by practicing yoga, we are going to evolve to a higher state. We don't

Did Yogananda and Babaji have a falling out?

Perhaps the most surprising moment of my entire inquiry into the legendary life of Babaji came in the midst of an interview with author Marshall Govindan, when the following lines fell from his lips:

"Babaji had a falling out with Yogananda. I was not at liberty to talk about it until this past July, when the *New Times* in L.A. did an in-depth investigative report on Swami Yogananda. They've discovered his son—he's in his late sixties now."

"What?" I said, totally taken back. Had I heard him right? I felt like a time traveler who must have missed some very significant events during the past years. Were we talking about the same Yogananda, the great yogi who inspired countless thousands to embark on the spiritual path in earnest?

Indeed, we were. Needless to say, over the next few weeks I followed up on Govindan's statement and did a little investigative reporting of my own. Sure enough, there was a serious situation developing at the headquarters of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF). Ben Erskine, a sixty-nine-year-old miner from Oregon, is claiming to be Yogananda's son—the result of an alleged tryst between the yogi and a Los Angeles photographer who was his devotee in the late thirties. While complaints and allegations have, in fact, been made regarding Yogananda's extracurricular relations with his female students going all the way back to the twenties, little has ever come of it. Until now. Over half a century later, legal machinations are underway and court-ordered

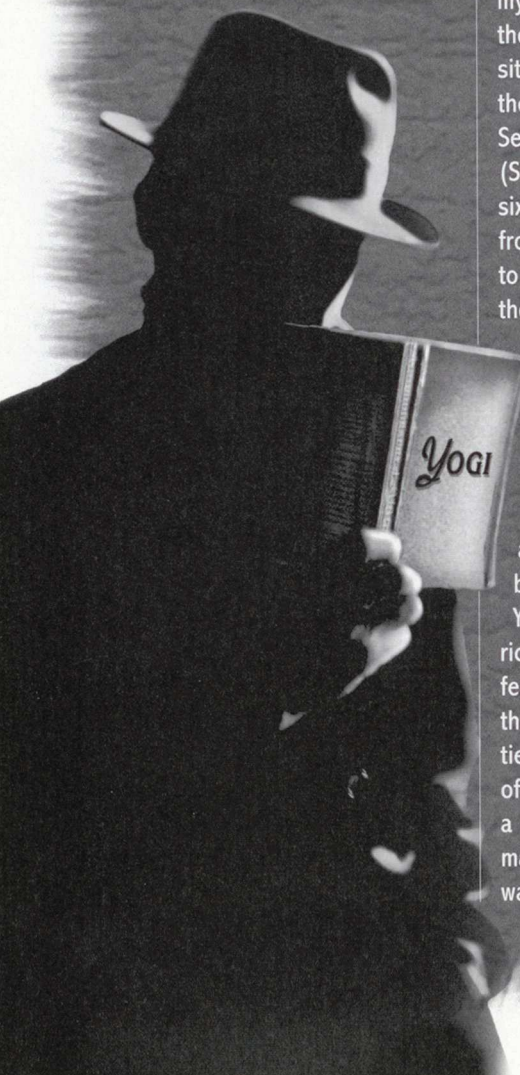
DNA tests may be forthcoming to determine Erskine's paternity. After speaking to several of the main players in the unfolding affair, including the reporter in L.A. who broke the story and Erskine himself, it is clear that there are some credible people who believe that Yogananda's public endorsement of celibacy stood in marked contrast to the way he conducted his private life. For example, Dr. Anil Nerode, mathematics professor at Cornell University and the son of one of Yogananda's early associates, says that his own father parted ways with the great yogi precisely because of this issue. Given his many childhood recollections of growing up in Yogananda's ashram, as well as his possession of thousands of his father's letters, diaries, and documents, he has little doubt about what the truth is. "To me, it is more than a theory," he told me last December.

Govindan, however, added one more dimension to the story that, not surprisingly, no one else I spoke to had ever heard. As he relayed it:

"In 1942, Babaji came to Yogananda and said, 'I want you to remove your

ochre cloth, because you're having these relationships with women. And it's not correct. You should take it off if you're not going to be a swami.' And Yogananda replied, 'But I *am* a swami.' He didn't want to. And that cut the link with Babaji right there. So I believe that there was some kind of a falling out."

Whatever the final result of this unfolding drama, the hearts of thousands, if not millions, worldwide who revere Yogananda as a God-realized soul hang in the balance. SRF completely denies all of the claims, and one former student I spoke with went as far as to say that it was his understanding that Yogananda never even allowed himself to be alone in a room with a woman and therefore certainly could never have fathered a child. Indeed, SRF insists that they will put the allegations to rest once and for all in the coming months. Hopefully, it will be that simple. Yet so far, they have been unable to produce effective refutations, and the more time that goes by, the more it is incumbent upon them to make clear the facts of the historical record.



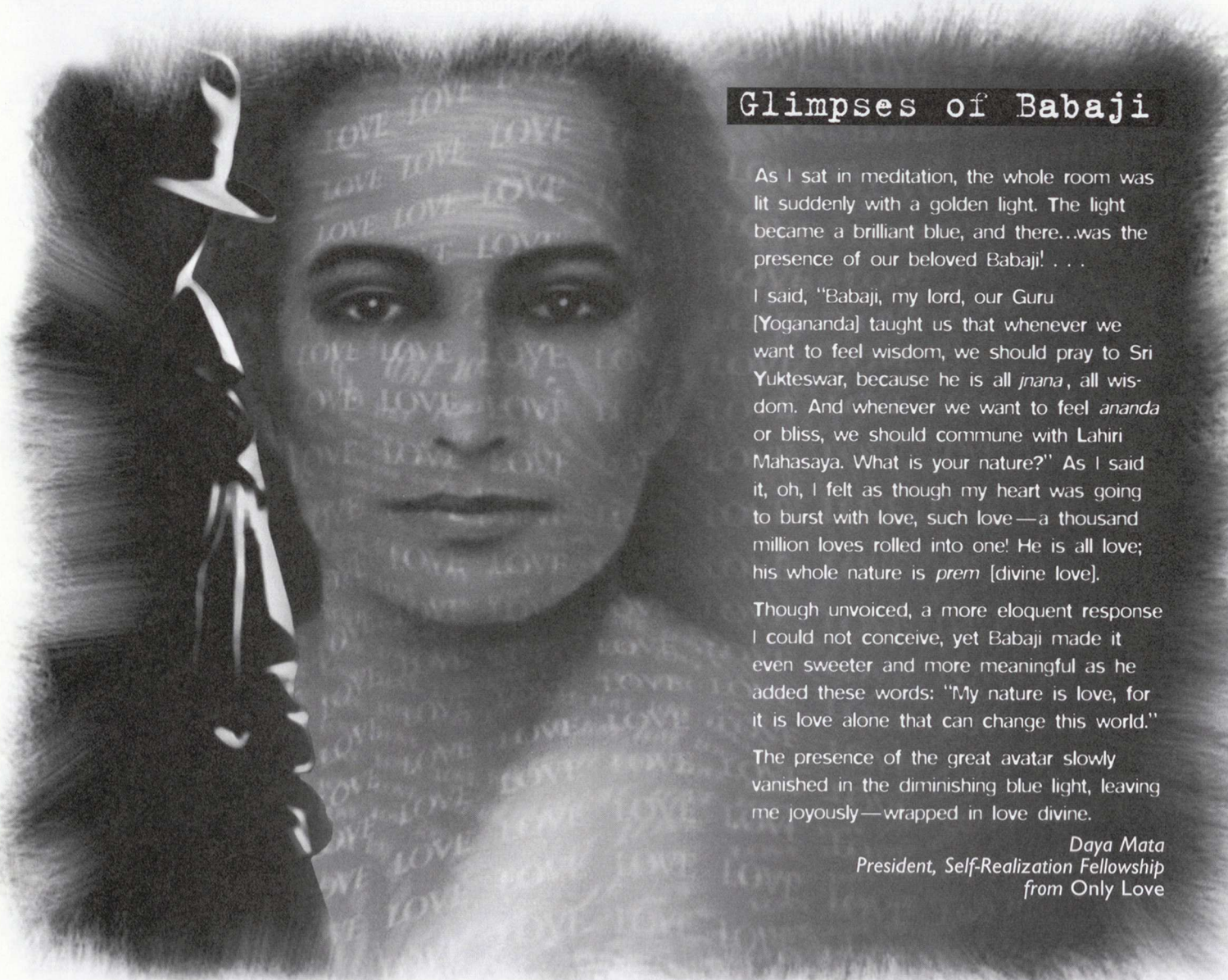
stop with human beings. That is the reason why I advise everybody: practice yoga, practice yoga, practice yoga! Because yoga doesn't confine itself to the physical plane. There are five bodies—physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and spiritual. Beyond the physical plane, there is the vital, beyond the vital, the mental, beyond the mental, the intellectual, and beyond the intellectual, the spiritual. So if you want to understand, you have to practice the fivefold path of Babaji's Kriya yoga. When you practice yoga, you start evolving on all five planes.

"So when that divinity, whom you call God, whom you call Shiva—call it by any name that you like—manifests itself in the spiritual plane, the greatest of criminals becomes a saint. And when that divine consciousness manifests itself in the intellectual plane, you become a sage, you become a *jnani*. When it manifests itself in the mental plane, you become a Patanjali, who gave us the Raja Yoga Sutras. When that divinity manifests itself in the vital plane, you become a Boganathar, who is the guru of Babaji, you become a yogi Jesus Christ. And when that divinity manifests itself in

the physical plane, you become a Babaji. Now do you understand the importance of Babaji?"

While I thought I could probably infer the importance of Babaji, I couldn't say I totally understood it. But it did sound similar to Yogananda's own descriptions of Babaji's attainment, when he speaks in his autobiography of Babaji surrendering to the Divine all the way down to the physical cells of his body.

Ramaiah seemed to be telling me that the qualities of any given spiritual realization depended on



Glimpses of Babaji

As I sat in meditation, the whole room was lit suddenly with a golden light. The light became a brilliant blue, and there...was the presence of our beloved Babaji! . . .

I said, "Babaji, my lord, our Guru [Yogananda] taught us that whenever we want to feel wisdom, we should pray to Sri Yukteswar, because he is all *jnana*, all wisdom. And whenever we want to feel *ananda* or bliss, we should commune with Lahiri Mahasaya. What is your nature?" As I said it, oh, I felt as though my heart was going to burst with love, such love—a thousand million loves rolled into one! He is all love; his whole nature is *prem* [divine love].

Though unvoiced, a more eloquent response I could not conceive, yet Babaji made it even sweeter and more meaningful as he added these words: "My nature is love, for it is love alone that can change this world."

The presence of the great avatar slowly vanished in the diminishing blue light, leaving me joyously—wrapped in love divine.

Daya Mata
President, Self-Realization Fellowship
from Only Love

what plane of existence that realization was manifesting on. Therefore, a spiritual realization that manifested on the physical plane would theoretically result in a transformation that would cause divine qualities to be expressed in the physical world. As Ramaiah put it:

“God, as you know, has no birth and no death. And when that divinity manifests itself in the physical, then the physical body does not die. You see how simple it is?”

Yes, in some respects, it did seem simple—that is, until I tried to *really* understand it. But attempts at further clarification brought only adamant injunctions to “practice yoga,” and to awaken the five bodies. Then everything would be clear.

Miraculously healed of bone tuberculosis at a young age by what he says was a divine intervention from Babaji, Ramaiah is nothing if not convinced that his life is not his own and is solely given over in service to his teacher. Calling himself “only dust on Babaji’s lotus feet,” he encourages others to practice Kriya yoga, but only in the context of a deep surrender to Babaji himself.

“When you receive the grace of a great Siddha like Kriya Babaji Nagaraj, then you really start flying like a jet plane. That’s the goal. When you try to do it on your own, trying to follow your ego, it is like crossing the ocean with a boat. That’s why I used to tell people all the time: ‘Why do you worry? Just get into the jet plane of Babaji and leave the flying to him.’”

While Ramaiah made it absolutely clear that I could not understand Babaji or his yoga through “telephone talk,” I was intrigued by his work, and by the Tamil Siddha tradition he passionately

champions. And he is not the only one who sees, in this ancient tradition, crucial insights into spiritual evolution as well as into the life and times of Babaji. Indeed, one of his former students, American author Marshall Govindan, has been inspired to take up the cause of the Siddha sages as well.

If you already believe in the legend of Babaji, then it won’t be a stretch to take a brief tour through South Indian history with Marshall Govindan. A dedicated Kriya yoga teacher and practitioner himself, Govindan is, without a doubt, keeper of the esoteric knowledge of all things Babaji-related. A serious scholar of yogic history who has earned the praise of noted yogic scholars such as Georg Feuerstein for his dedication to the field, Govindan tells a version of Indian history that is part scholarship, part speculation. It goes something like this: The Siddha yogis stem from an ancient tradition located on a lost continent below Sri Lanka that was once connected to Australia but was submerged in the ocean by a great cataclysm around ten thousand years ago. The tradition survived into modern times through the teachings of a long lineage of great saints, the names of whom are well known to Indian ears. And if you’re wondering what all of this has to do with Babaji, here is the answer: According to Govindan, Babaji was actually a part of this tradition, trained by one of the great Siddha saints in the second century—which makes him not quite immortal, just eighteen hundred years young. Moreover, it is this tradition, Govindan tells us, that has performed the most radical experiments in evolutionary development so far, and in so doing, has brought to life a concept that seems to be capturing the attention of more and more in today’s world: physical immortality

through the attainment of what is usually referred to as the “light body.” And if this doesn’t sound like the Hindu Vedantic goal of *moksha*, or liberation, that you learned about in Eastern Religion 101, fear not. It isn’t. The goal of this path is different from what we normally think of as enlightenment, as Govindan pointed out when I spoke to him last November:

“Sri Yukteswar, Yogananda’s teacher, said that Babaji’s attainment was inconceivable. It didn’t fit the paradigm of enlightenment as he knew it, which is *moksha*, liberation. The goal of *moksha* is very characteristic of North India, which is largely Vedantic. The Northern yogis look at the Siddhas of South India and scratch their heads. ‘Why would anyone want to stay on this physical plane indefinitely? They must have some bad karma.’

“When I started going to India thirty years ago, that is the response I got from even great swamis in the North—people like Yogi Bhajan and Swami Muktananda. I met Swami Muktananda in 1973, in a private interview, and I asked him, ‘What’s the difference between your yoga and the yoga of the Siddhas and Babaji?’ And he asked me about some of these Siddhas, and I mentioned that they were immortals. And he said, ‘It’s impossible for anyone to become immortal.’

“This is a very common difficulty that people who have been brought up in the Advaita Vedantic tradition have, because for them the world is something that is illusory or really not worth much—a big distraction. But the Siddhas saw that the world is divine, and that it’s all in a process of evolution—whether it be inert matter, or animals, or whatever. We’re all part of this process of evolution.

“So when I train people, I show

them not only how to go up into spiritual enlightenment, but I show them how to transform themselves intellectually, mentally, vitally, and physically. It's a complete transformation. Now this is a very tall order, and I tell people right in the introductory lecture that if their goal is simply to go to heaven or to find some *moksha*, there are lots of easier paths. This is not an easy path. It's a long process. It takes many, many births, but the rewards are much more complete. I mean, do you think that the cells of the physical body are interested in your enlightenment?"

I had to admit, it wasn't a question that had ever occurred to me. But since we can hardly walk further out on a limb, spiritually speaking, let's assume for a moment that my cells were interested. That would make me a prime candidate for what the Siddhas would see as perhaps the ultimate goal of spiritual evolution—the transfiguration of the physical body into light, i.e., the attainment of the light body. If the idea sounds somehow vaguely familiar, it might just be because it is reminiscent of another radical transfiguration that took place thousands of miles west of India a couple of hundred years before even Babaji was born: Jesus' resurrection. The connection is not as far-fetched as one might think. Even respected Christian authorities like Brother David Steindl-Rast have pursued similarities between Eastern conceptions of the "light body" and the Christian faith in the "resurrection body." And the interfaith similarities don't stop with Christianity. As author John White points out (see page 92), the light body is a concept talked about in some form or other in almost all of the world's great religious traditions. Of course, there is an obvious catch: there simply

aren't a lot of individuals walking around showing off their light bodies and proving in real time the truth of these esoteric teachings and the destiny of human evolution. And therein lies the importance, for many, of Babaji. His legend has helped to stoke the fire of believers who are convinced that the impossible might actually be possible, and that our cells might be destined, through the evolutionary fast-track of Kriya yoga or some other equally effective method, to evolve into light. As Satyananda, the monk from SRF, put it in our talk:

"The process of Kriya yoga itself is a transmutation of physical energy into spiritual energy, spiritual energy into consciousness, consciousness into higher consciousness. And in that sense we are working within Kriya yoga as a scientific *pranayam* [breath control]. We're working with refining the cells of the body into spirit so to speak. And the person in meditation, through this *pranayam*, has the experience of almost being dissolved in that light of God. And as we go into greater experiences through this, ultimately all of us want to have that liberating experience of dissolving our physical selves into the light of God."

"Do you think that we would actually physically dissolve?"

"It can happen on the physical plane, and that leads to some of the prophetic stories about saints dissolving their bodies or materializing themselves and dematerializing themselves. . . . In death, or even in life, an accomplished yogi can offer his cells, in this sense, to the cosmos, and literally dissolve his physical cells into light particles. It's pretty awesome. And, in fact, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda talks scientifically, and he describes how

meditating yogis can actually create a state of infinite mass within their physical body cells, and how, once this expansion into infinite mass occurs, we are no longer bound by the constant in the universe that is the speed of light. And then the pervading consciousness of the yogi has the power of complete control over the physical universe."

He was making cellular evolution sound like an idea whose time has definitely come. My only question was, What about Babaji? Our yoga scholar Marshall Govindan is convinced that Babaji and others have passed through some version of this process and come out on the other side enlightened, both literally and figuratively. But had he actually ever seen Babaji in person? Did Govindan have some actual experience of Babaji's living presence to confirm his theory, or was this all academic? The question turned out to be more complicated than it first appeared.

You see, Govindan actually claims to have had several meetings with Babaji, which he says were extraordinarily powerful and which left him profoundly and permanently changed, and I would not doubt his sincerity for a moment. Yet the question of actually *seeing* Babaji was never quite resolved.

"I saw Babaji in the Himalayas two years ago," Govindan told me. "He appeared on the vital plane."

"On the vital plane? Not the physical?"

"It was the vital plane superimposed on the physical," Govindan replied.

Having absolutely no idea what that meant, I tried a more direct route. "Could you physically touch him?" I asked.



Glimpses of Babaji

On [one] occasion Babaji's sacred circle was disturbed by the arrival of a stranger. He had climbed with astonishing skill to the nearly inaccessible ledge near the guru's camp. "Sir, you must be the great Babaji."

The man's face was lit with inexpressible reverence. "For months I have pursued a ceaseless search for you among these forbidding crags. I implore you to accept me as a disciple."

When the great guru made no response, the man pointed to the rock-lined chasm below the ledge. "If you refuse me I will jump from this mountain. Life has no further value if I cannot win your guidance to the Divine."

"Jump, then," Babaji said unemotionally. "I cannot accept you in your present state of development."

The man immediately hurled himself over the cliff.

Babaji instructed the shocked disciples to fetch the stranger's body. After they had returned with the mangled form, the master placed his hand on the dead man. Lo! he opened his eyes and prostrated himself humbly before the omnipotent guru.

"You are now ready for discipleship," Babaji beamed lovingly on his resurrected *chela*. "You have courageously passed a difficult test. Death shall not touch you again; now you are one of our immortal flock."

Paramahansa Yogananda
from *Autobiography of a Yogi*

"No, I did not actually feel him physically, but there was like this parallel reality. In order to perceive things on the vital plane, there's a certain opening that has to take place in your third eye. It's a difficult thing to describe."

I was beginning to appreciate that fact.

Of all those to whom I spoke for this article, Marshall Govindan must be commended for his impressive efforts to bring some historical and intellectual rigor to the

phenomenon that is Babaji, and for his conviction in the evolutionary benefits of serious Kriya yoga practice. Also, much to his credit, he cautioned against having a "goal-oriented," materialistic relationship to any of these exalted attainments, a danger that seems to go with the territory. Interest in these matters must always be balanced, he told me, with "the practice of surrender" to the Divine. Otherwise, as he put it, "it's just the ego talking."

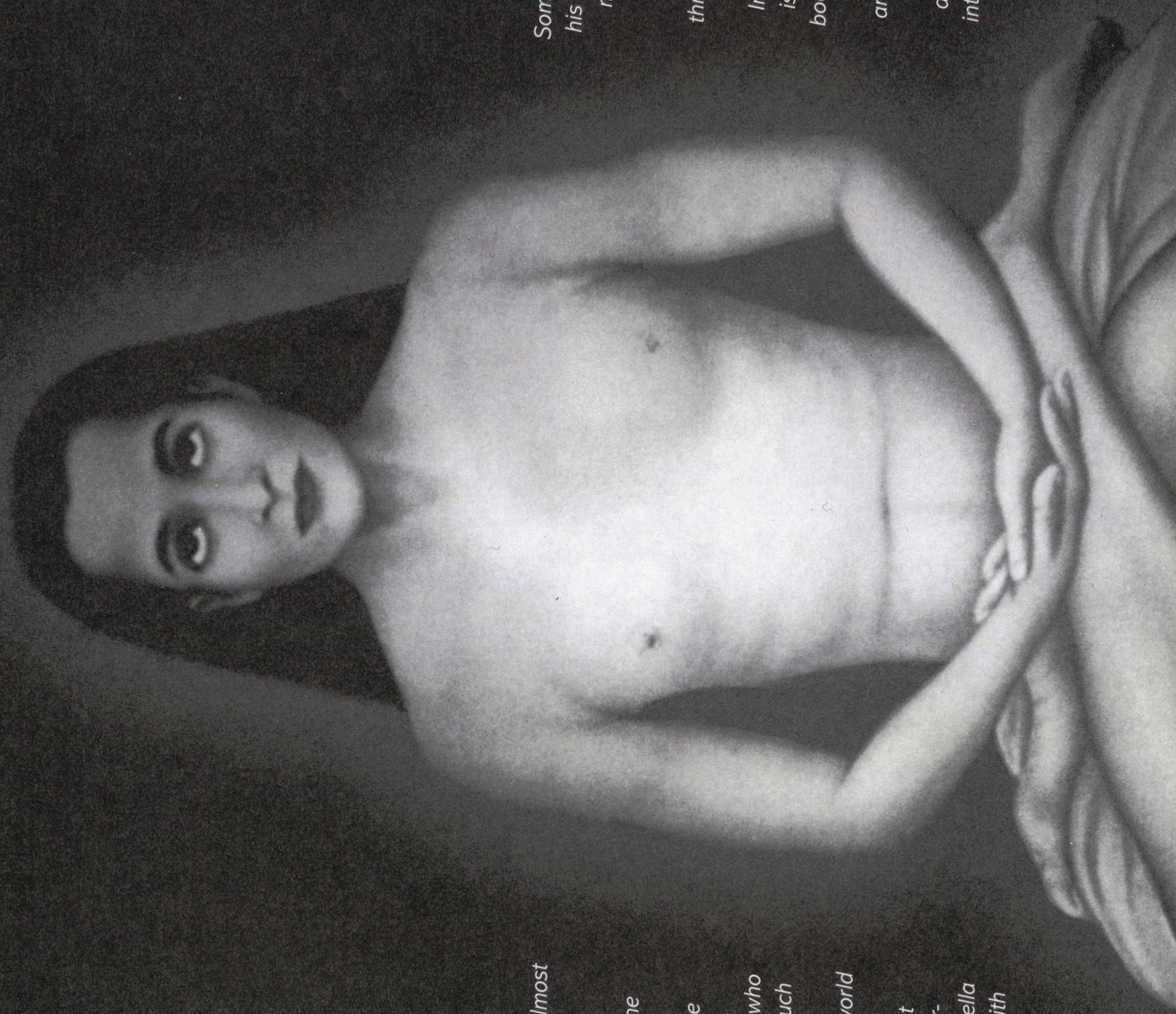
So where did all of this leave

me with Babaji himself? Although I was understanding more and more of what we might call the theory of this immortal sage, the facts remained elusive. And I still had not yet spoken with anyone who had actually physically seen him. Time was growing short, but I had a few more people left to talk to.

An American Swami

"Few in our culture realize that living Gurus walk among us" are the words written across the cover

continued on p. 162



Mahavatar Babaji is this almost mythical figure of spiritual fatherhood for the world. Meaning that of all yogis he is like the maha-yogi and that's why Yogananda gave him the title of Mahavatar, meaning the great avatar, who has promised to stay in touch with the world and guide spiritual evolution for the world for the coming millennium.

So we have this almost mythological figure . . . performing a kind of an umbrella task of helping to assist with the spirituality of mankind.

Brother Satyananda
WIE Interview, December 2001

Sometimes Babaji materializes his body and just participates magically in human history.

But other times he comes through birth and he goes through the learning process exactly like the rest of us. In some of those bodies he is almost invisible to everybody around him unless they are spiritually enlightened and can perceive who he is, because it takes a certain amount of imagination and intelligence to even conceive of the idea of the eternal father in human form.

Leonard Orr
WIE interview, January 2002

He is an accomplished Siddha, a Master of the elements. . . . He can materialize his body and he is in a permanent super-conscious state.

Roy Eugene Davis
WIE interview, October 2001

Babaji is Love. He's simply Love. When you know who you are, then you know who Babaji is. And that's literally true because he is not the object, he is the subject. He's the seer rather than the seen.

Marshall Govindan
WIE interview, December 2001

Babaji's spiritual state is beyond human comprehension. The dwarfed vision of men cannot pierce to his transcendental star. One attempts in vain to even picture the avatar's attainment. It is inconceivable.

Sri Yukteswar
from Autobiography of a Yogi

Who Am I?

I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute. I am That by very nature. I cannot be anything else but that as I am That alone without a beginning and an end. It is My real innate nature. I am the Absolute and Supreme Self, both within and without the finitude. I am Truth, eternal and everlasting. I am the Absolute One, all in Myself: None exists save I in and through all that exist. I am ever All-Existence itself, I am the changeless One in the midst of all changes. I am the Formless in all forms. Change is linked up with form and form is labeled with change, but I am beyond the two. I am not susceptible to all the ills of the flesh that exist crawling under the feet of form and change. I am the monistic unity here, there, and everywhere and at all times—nay, for all times. Where is happiness except in perfect realization of the One without a second? . . . DEATH IS A JOKE TO ME AND I AM THE DEATH OF DEATH. I am the Infinite, the Eternal, and the Immortal Self.

excerpted from the book Babaji's Masterkey to All Ills
dictated by Babaji to V.T. Neelakantan

Whenever anyone utters with reverence the name of Babaji, that person attracts an instant spiritual blessing.

Lahiri Mahasaya
from Autobiography of a Yogi

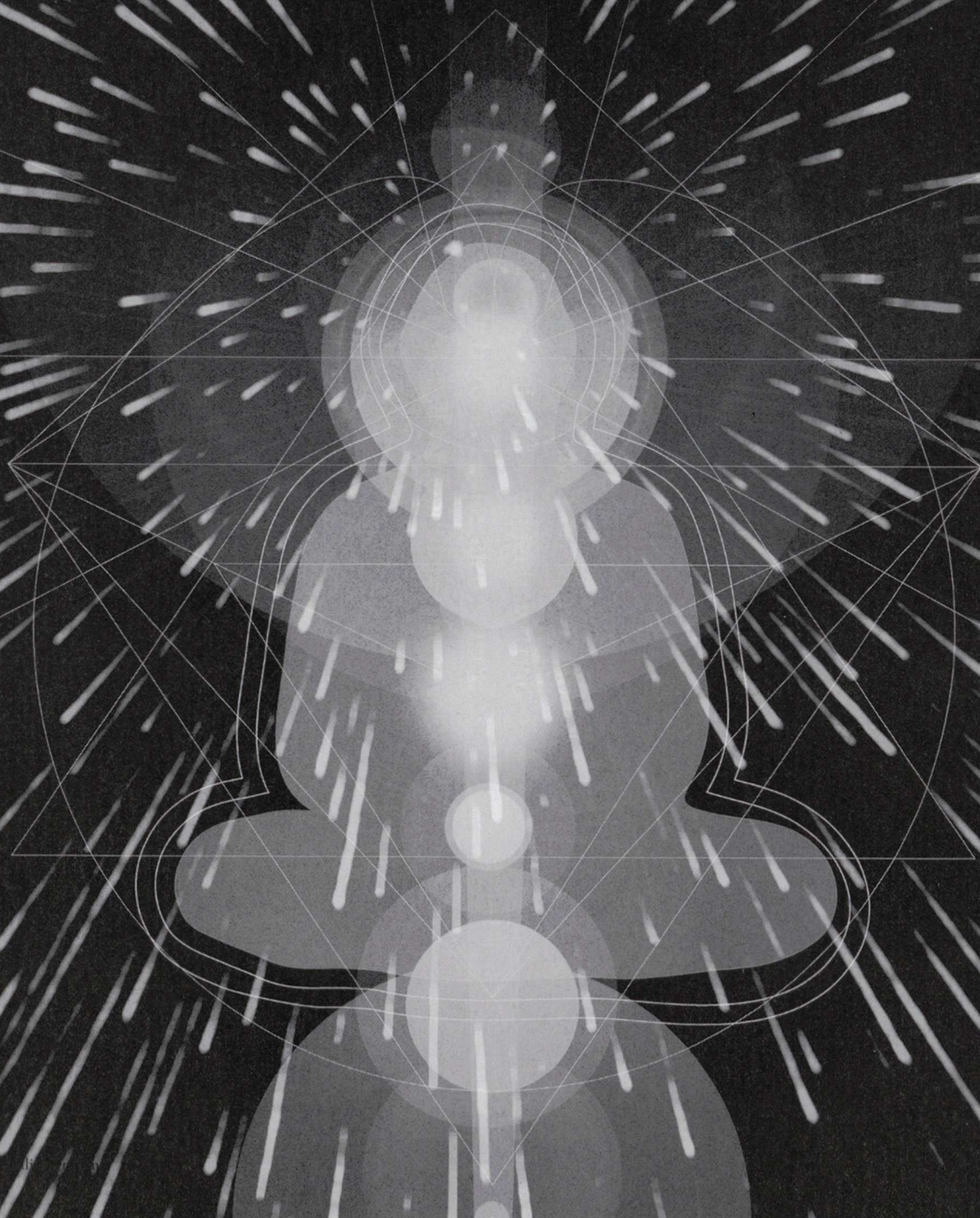
The deathless Babaji is an avatara. In the Hindu scriptures, avatara signals the descent of divinity into flesh.

Swami Yogananda
from Autobiography of a Yogi

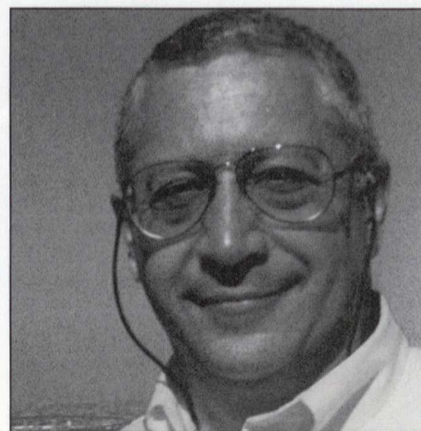
Babaji is the definitive Maestro of involution. Spiritual involution is that next step in which Babaji is sort of the godfather, if you will, in terms of getting us to turn our lives inward. Babaji was initiated by Krishna, and empowered or given the mission to keep Yoga alive throughout the ages, and to keep the process of spiritual self-inquiry, spiritual involution alive, to keep that through Yoga, to keep that process for humanity flowering.

Donald Schnell
WIE interview, January 2002

Enlightenment and the Body of Light



When our research took us into the mind-stretching realms of the highest yogic attainment, we were happy to be able to rely on our dear friend and fellow dharmanaut John White for guidance. White, intrepid explorer and tireless documenter of the highest in human potential, has written extensively about an evolutionary shift in consciousness that he sees transforming humanity. Here, he provides us with a brief retrospective survey, through history and across traditions, of what some believe to be our evolutionary destiny—the attainment of “the light body.”



by John White

ENLIGHTENMENT IS THE goal of human life, for the individual and for the race. Enlightenment is awakening to the presence of God as the One-in-all and All-in-one and then expressing that nondual realization in every aspect of your existence. Simply put, enlightenment is God-realization, i.e., making God real in the totality of your being.

Enlightenment, therefore, is a developmental process, not a one-time event. It is the highest aspect of our human potential for self-directed growth in body, mind, and spirit. That human potential can change the human condition.

Enlightenment is not purely psychological. In the course of higher human development, physical changes also occur, most dramatically in the later phases of the enlightenment process. In the final phase, according to various sacred traditions, the body is alchemically changed into light. Enlightenment becomes literally so, through the transubstantiation of flesh, blood, and bone into an immortal body of light. Through a combination of personal effort and divine grace, a person attains a deathless condition through the alchemical transmutation of his or her ordinary fleshly

body. This transubstantiated body is called various names in the traditions, such as light body, solar body, diamond body, or resurrection body. I'll expand on that below.

If involution is the materialization of Spirit and evolution is the spiritualization of matter, then the end of evolution—final enlightenment—is the complete return of matter to Spirit as humans attain full expression of their inherent divinity and become Godmen and Godwomen. It is the conquest of death. It is the return to the condition of “that which never dies and that which was never born.”

From Morality to Mysticism

Morality, or the moral dimension of life, is the foundation for the process of higher human development to enlightenment. However, the process only begins there. As a person practices spiritual disciplines—prayer, meditation, or esoteric psychotechnologies—to deepen his or her relationship with God, the person ascends in consciousness to higher and higher planes of existence. Mystical experience and arcane metaphysics come to the forefront of the person's consciousness, and the light of God shines ever more brightly through every aspect of the person's life.

Ultimately, the quest for enlightenment leads one to actually becoming light—attaining the body of light and becoming a being of light. Morality and virtue are then understood to be the human reflection of divine attributes, and the practice of mysticism is understood as a process of becoming, quite literally, more and more Godlike.

The important thing in the process is, as the Bhagavad Gita puts it, to “fix your heart on God,” submit your will to the Divine Will, and then invoke the Holy Spirit, the Shekinah Glory, the Goddess Kundalini, etcetera, as the entry point

for your spiritual practice. Support that with moral behavior, cultivation of the body and mind, works of social goodness and civic responsibility. In other words, live a life of integral practice, so that your entire being—body, mind, and spirit—is oriented to the attainment of enlightenment. God will take care of the rest. Through spiritual refinement, the psychophysical dross of your humanity is removed. Then you can “cast off” the flesh body through the death process. You put on the “seamless robe of light.” You no longer cast a shadow because you do not have a Shadow.

Sacred Traditions for Higher Human Development

If there is an inner unity or transcendent common core to world religions and sacred traditions, we should expect that the human potential for transubstantiation would be understood by all of them. Indeed, that is just what we find. Some of the names given to the body of light are as follows:

- ▶ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is called "the resurrection body" and "the glorified body." The prophet Isaiah said, "The dead shall live, their bodies shall rise" (Isa. 26:19). St. Paul called it "the celestial body" or "spiritual body" (*soma pneumatikon*) (1 Corinthians 15:40).
- ▶ In Sufism it is called "the most sacred body" (*wujud al-aqdas*) and "supracelestial body" (*jism asli haqiqi*).
- ▶ In Taoism, it is called "the diamond body," and those who have attained it are called "the immortals" and "the cloudwalkers."
- ▶ In Tibetan Buddhism it is called "the light body."
- ▶ In Tantrism and some schools of yoga, it is called "the *vajra* body," "the adamantine body," and "the divine body."
- ▶ In Kriya yoga it is called "the body of bliss."
- ▶ In Vedanta it is called "the superconductive body."
- ▶ In Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, it is called "the radiant body."
- ▶ In the alchemical tradition, the

▶ Emerald Tablet calls it "the Glory of the Whole Universe" and "the golden body." The alchemist Paracelsus called it "the astral body."

▶ In the Hermetic Corpus, it is called "the immortal body" (*soma athanaton*).

▶ In some mystery schools, it is called "the solar body."

▶ In Rosicrucianism, it is called "the diamond body of the temple of God."

▶ In ancient Egypt it was called "the luminous body or being" (*akh*).

▶ In Old Persia it was called "the indwelling divine potential" (*fravashi* or *fravarti*).

▶ In the Mithraic liturgy it was called "the perfect body" (*soma teilion*).

▶ In the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, it is called "the divine body," composed of supramental substance.

▶ In the philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin, it is called "the ultrahuman."

There probably are other traditions that have analogous terms, and I would be glad to be informed of them. As I see it, these are different terms for the same ultimate stage of human evolution. (I feel quite tentative about Teilhard de Chardin because he is not specific in his writings about the somatic

changes which lead to the evolved human. I have excluded Nietzsche's *ubermensch* altogether for that and other reasons.)

The traditions speak of the process in different ways. Is the immortal body created or released, attained or manifested? Is it pre-existent within the individual and the gross matter of the body simply "burned" away? Or is the gross matter of the body altered through a process not yet recognized by physical science, which changes the atoms of flesh into something unnamed on the Periodic Table of Elements? Is there more than one route to the final, perfected form of the human body-mind? Is it necessary to actually die biologically, or is there an alternate path to the light body that bypasses physical death? These are provocative questions which remain to be explored. However this state is achieved, the perfected individual is then capable of operating within ordinary space-time through that altered vehicle of consciousness which is immortal. That vehicle of consciousness is no longer carbon-based as is biological flesh. Rather, it is composed of a finer, more ethereal form of energy-substance unknown to conventional physics, but long known to metaphysics and higher mysticism. That condition is, for the individual, the most exalted stage of higher human development; for humanity in general, it is the final stage of evolution. ■

EVOLUTION AFTER **DARWIN**

THE EMPIRICISTS



THE FUTURE OF
GOD 3

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Introduction by Elizabeth Debold

FEW HUMAN BEINGS, other than spiritual revolutionaries like Jesus or the Buddha, have affected our relationship with the Divine to the extent that Charles Darwin has. And what an unlikely revolutionary—modest, humble, devoted to his family, initially a traditional and devout Christian, Darwin's primary empirical research concerned the classification of *barnacles*. Yet, in the long march into modernity, his articulation of the mechanisms by which evolution happens—random mutation and natural selection—was itself quite a leap. Darwin's theory continued the transformation of the Western worldview begun when Copernicus first noticed that the Earth revolves around the Sun. Changes occur randomly in organisms, he asserted, and those changes will affect how well a particular organism can adapt to its environment. Better adapted organisms are the ones that will tend to survive, produce offspring,

and thus be naturally selected to survive generation after generation. It was astonishingly simple. There was no God, no divine plan or guidance, just a series of chance mutations in a dog-eat-dog world.

Darwin's theory nearly shattered the traditional Christian notion that humanity, poised between beast and angel, was literally formed in God's image. Darwin pointed out, long before we knew that we share 98.5 percent of our genetic material with chimpanzees, that what looks back at us in the mirror is not the face of God but is kin to the earthbound apes. Western culture's faith in a God-given soul and a deep-seated moral compass was rocked: What did it mean that we came into being from such ignominious ancestors through such a vicious and cold process? As the *Edinburgh Review* warned at the time, "a revolution in thought is imminent, which will shake society to its very foundations by destroying the

sanctity of the conscience and the religious sense." For this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, nearly 150 years after Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, we wanted to know what happened to the evolutionary revolution that threatened to destroy the moral underpinnings of society—and what can we learn of God's future and our own from the latest in evolutionary thought?

Darwin's theory *did* create a revolution in thought. It took over 100 years for the shock of our humble origins to wear off and for scientists to begin to address the serious implications that Darwinian evolution has for understanding human nature. During that time, greatly due to Darwin's contribution, Western culture's faith in science grew, as faith in a Supreme Being guiding our destiny diminished. Nietzsche, the German philosopher, might not have been so convincing in his assertion that God is dead without the final blow of

Darwinian theory. The most orthodox Darwinian position asserts that evolution has no direction—and certainly no *purpose* (which comes too close to suggesting some sort of divine guidance). In fact, this was Darwin's own view.

Yet, the theory that drove Darwin himself to agnosticism has proven to be a source of extraordinary inspiration—in ways that might have surprised Darwin himself. Talk to a few staunch Darwinists about evolution and you very often hear an excitement and awe at the sheer outrageous glory of the process itself that is usually reserved for the sacred. And what might Darwin have thought about the work of the French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin? Teilhard argued that the recognition by human consciousness of the evolution of life was "the most prodigious event ever recorded by history" since the advent of our capacity for self-reflection. For

“Something fascinating seems to happen when human beings begin to ponder the process of evolution. Something that calls forth awe at diversity and recognizes unity in life.”

Teilhard, writing in the mid-twentieth century, the scientific modern world did not mean the end of all that is sacred in human life. Far from it. Our recognition of what is actually happening with life in the cosmos, the expansion of our collective view, ushered in an extraordinary possibility for humanity to consciously participate in evolution. “The human is not the center of the universe, as we once naïvely believed,” he wrote in *The Human Phenomenon*, “but something much finer, the rising arrow of the great biological synthesis. . . . All evolution . . . becom[es] conscious of itself deep within us. . . . Not only do we read the secret of its movements in our slightest acts, but to a fundamental extent we *hold it in our own hands*: responsible for its past to its future.” Our grasp of evolution, Teilhard tells us, brings conscious intelligence to what has been the agonizingly slow transformation of matter and life—it

marks the point where the material and the spiritual move forward into a new creation, embodied as ourselves.

Something fascinating seems to happen when human beings begin to ponder the process of evolution. Something that calls forth awe at diversity and recognizes unity in life. Even Darwin, in *The Descent of Man*, used his own godless logic to envision a greater human unity that borders on the spiritual: “As man advances in civilization,” he wrote, “and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races.” In the century and a half since Darwin first published his theory,

science has gathered extraordinary new knowledge about the explosion of the cosmos out of the Big Bang, deciphered the DNA source code that combines and recombines in a proliferation of life, and discovered underlying structures in the development of language, culture, and human cognition. More and more, in almost every corner of the universe, there is *more and more*—expansion, movement, undeniable diversity, greater complexity, increasingly sophisticated communication, technology, civilization. *Something* is evolving—and that evolution is making new sense out of Darwin’s recognition that all species are related. As the mechanisms and processes of evolution—biological, psychological, and cultural—have been brought to light, an increasing number of scientists have found themselves straining at the limit of the empirical enterprise, at the edge of an emergence that, through their own

intelligence, they and all of humanity are part of and responsible for.

So, what happened to evolution after Darwin? we wanted to know. What is it that evolutionary empiricists have learned about the constantly emerging patterns of life that brings them to the very boundary between science and spirituality or moral philosophy? Where is it that our current knowledge of evolution takes us as individuals and as a species? To help us explore this new terrain, which is now called “evolutionary psychology,” we interviewed two avowed empiricists who, touched by the evolutionary vision of Teilhard de Chardin, have dared to step back from the details of the data, look at the cosmic dimensions of creation’s inexorable forward momentum, and take from it critical lessons for future human evolution: Robert Wright, author of *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, and Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *The Evolving Self*.

4.5
4.0
4.4
4.2
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3.8
3.6
3.4
3.2
3.0
2.8

Ardipithecus
ramidus

Australopithecus
anamensis

Australopithecus afarensis

Australopithecus
aethiopicus

Australopithecus
afaricus

suggestions of a Larger Purpose

an interview with
Robert Wright
by **Elizabeth Debold**





FOR ROBERT WRIGHT, his own interest in human nature and evolution was born with the field of evolutionary psychology. "I'd always been interested in human nature and in psychology," Wright told us on the phone from his Princeton, New Jersey, home. "And I was also independently interested in evolution, just in the

idea of it as the creative process. When I was in college in the late seventies, these two fields started to come together, the study of evolution and the study of psychology. It was then called sociobiology and came to be called evolutionary psychology." Perhaps because of his traditional Christian upbringing, Wright's deep

interest in the meaning and purpose of life—what he calls "the cosmic question"—has led him from a successful career in journalism, writing for magazines such as *The New Republic* and *The Atlantic Monthly* (and currently writing "The Earthling" column for the online magazine *Slate*), to a position as a visiting scholar

in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania in recognition of his achievement as one of the new breed of evolutionary psychologists.

Wright's passion for the big questions led us to want to speak with him about evolution after Darwin. In his first book on evolutionary psychology, *The Moral Animal*,

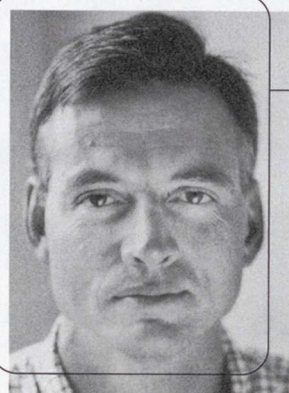
he ingeniously used Darwin's own life and career to show the implications that an understanding of evolutionary psychology brings to everyday life. Looking straight at the fact that so many choices we seem to freely make are governed by the genetic imperative to reproduce, Wright took on, without flinching, the tough moral issues raised by a deeper understanding of the mechanics of human nature. Ending with a guarded optimism about the potential for humanity to choose a morality for

the greater good rather than following relentless genetic self-interest, Wright did not stop there. His next book, *Nonzero*, widened his scope even further, looking not only at biological evolution but at the development of human culture as well. His bold thesis is that, even despite ourselves, evolution proceeds through cooperative arrangements rather than "survival-of-the-fittest" competition. From this enormous perspective on the creative logic of life, Wright recognizes that the next step in

evolution demands from us an ethic of cooperation based in the true interdependence of human life.

Most impressive about Wright is his intellectual honesty and integrity. He holds a firm line between empirical science and metaphysical speculation that few scientists maintain. Even though he asserts that natural selection can explain nearly everything about the development of life on this planet, including the complexity of human life, Wright, unlike many Darwinists, will not infer from this that there is no

God or higher principle at work in the cosmos. He also finds the spiritual perspective of the French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin to be deeply compelling even as here, too, he cannot verify Teilhard's spiritual claims. In the following interview, Wright takes us to the edge of where empirical evolution can go, to the suggestion of a greater meaning that the evolutionary evidence points to—and reminds us that if life's experiment is to continue on this planet, it is up to us.



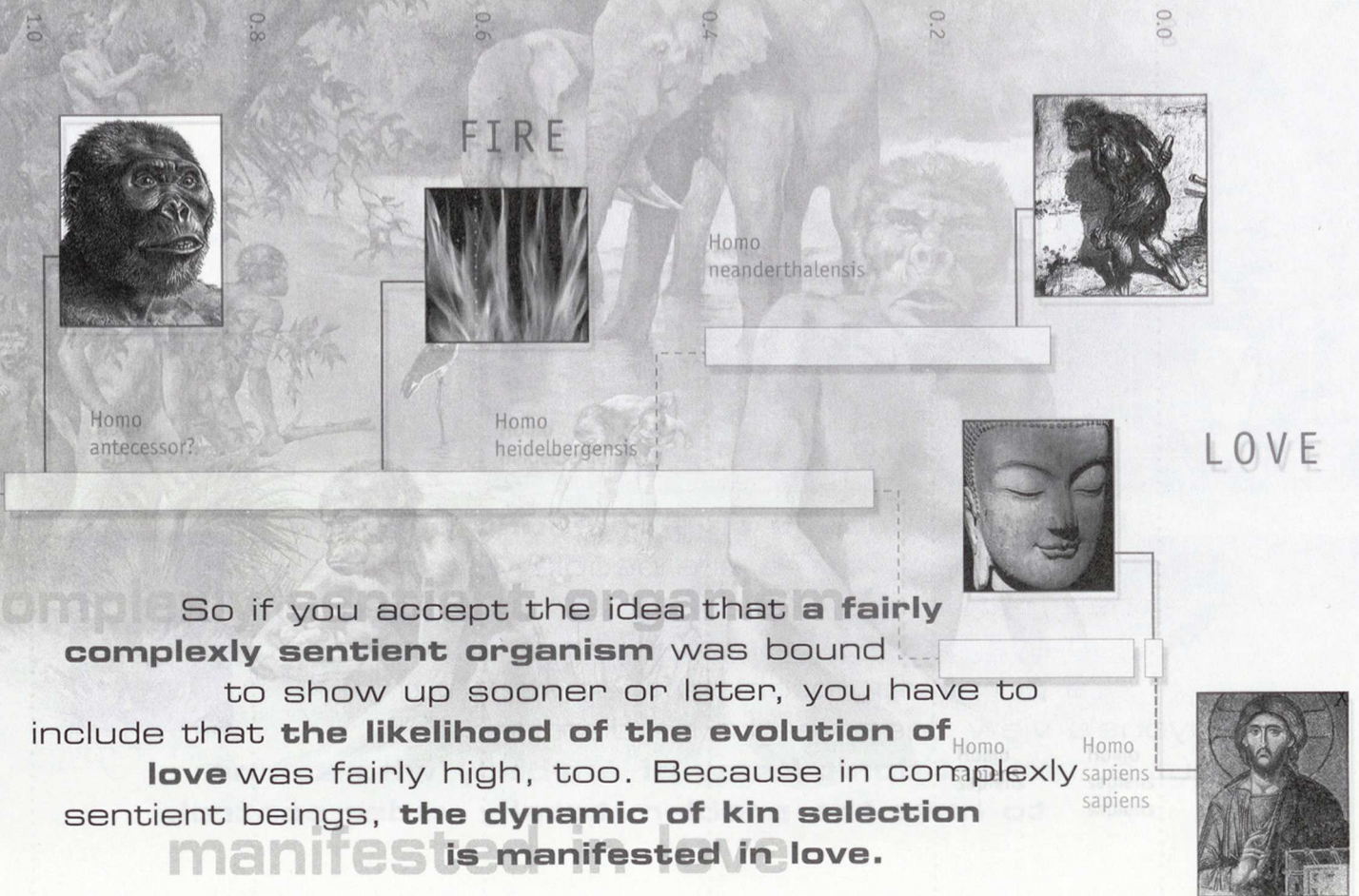
Robert Wright

wie: In doing research about evolution, we came across your latest book, Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny. We were

intrigued and fascinated by the breadth and scope of what you were presenting about organic and cultural evolution. I'm also familiar with your previous book, about evolutionary psychology, The Moral Animal. What struck me is your real interest in Darwin and, particularly, your interest in the moral dimensions and implications of evolutionary theory. So I was wondering how did your interest in Darwinian evolution and morality develop?

ROBERT WRIGHT: I was brought up in a conventionally religious way, as a Southern Baptist, which

gives you a pretty intense concern with religious questions. It's just a very intense experience being a Southern Baptist! I don't know if that's the reason that even long after I ceased to be a Southern Baptist, I was still interested in the "God" question. Not necessarily the question of whether there's exactly the kind of God that Christians envision, but the question of whether, in some sense, there is a larger purpose or a transcendent source of meaning—whether there is some kind of hidden order that one should align one's self with. I'm actually paraphrasing the way William James defined religion—as the *idea* that there is a hidden order and that your supreme interest lies in aligning yourself with that order. That's a definition broad enough to encompass a lot of religions.



That, I think, gave me an interest in the direction of evolution—the question of whether evolution has a direction and, if it does, whether that direction is indicative of any larger purpose, whether it's a morally significant direction, you might say. If the question is whether there is some larger purpose to being human, you have to look at the process that created human beings and inspect that for signs of larger purpose. And evolution by natural selection seems to be that process.

WIE: Can you give us a brief overview of Darwin's theory?

RW: Well, of all the important scientific theories, it's perhaps the simplest. In a certain sense, it can't help but be true; it's tautologically true. I don't mean tautological in a bad sense, necessarily, but the basic idea is: Those genetically based

traits that are most conducive to getting genes into subsequent generations are those traits that will accumulate in the course of evolution. With some human psychological traits, it's obvious why they were favored by natural selection. For example, take the hunger drive. If you imagine ancestors that weren't inclined to eat, you are imagining ancestors that actually wouldn't become ancestors. They would die before they could reproduce. And it's the same with the sex drive. It's clear how lust would help you get genes into future generations.

WIE: You also speak about cultural evolution. Could you explain what that is?

RW: If genetic evolution is the selective transmission of genetic information, then cultural evolution is the selective transmission of non-genetic information: everything from

technologies to religious doctrines to songs. Everything, every kind of information that goes from person to person and isn't genes, is part of cultural evolution. And because people are selective in what they transmit—I may hear a song and choose not to whistle it or choose to whistle it—the collective body of cultural information changes all the time. And that's what got us from the Stone Age to where we are now.

WIE: Obviously, the difference between the Stone Age and where we are now is enormous. What is it that has created this difference? What kinds of principles seem to be at work?

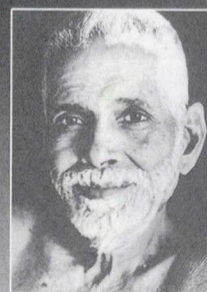
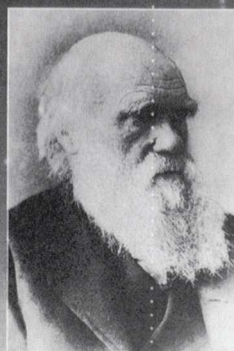
RW: One thing I talked about in *Nonzero* is how we got to a kind of globally interconnected and interdependent society. I contend that the way we got there is that people have this penchant for playing

Copernicus



Galileo

Charles Darwin

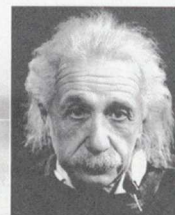


Ramana Maharshi

Consciousness is this profound problem for science. Now, there are people who think they have a way around this, but I disagree. Yet, I have to add, consciousness is such a perplexing problem that I don't think anyone's view deserves to be dismissed out of hand. **I don't know of anybody who seems to have the problem totally under control.**

HOMO SAPIENS SAPIENS

Albert Einstein



what are called “nonzero sum games,” that is, potentially cooperative games. And for that reason they have, over the ages, invented technologies that have allowed them to play these games on a larger and larger scale. And that’s especially responsible for the evolution of information technologies. While it’s a very incremental and slow process, the fact is that you can trace the lineage of a laptop computer back to the invention of writing in ancient Sumer or ancient India or the Americas, and further.

Cultural evolution is a very gradual thing, but over time it becomes momentous in its implications. So that today, we are all involved in these kinds of nonzero sum games with people halfway around the world, and we’re not even aware of the various cooperative webs that we’re embedded in.

Cooperation and Cultural Evolution

WIE: Could you explain what “nonzero sum” or “nonzero sumness” is?

RW: Yes. The basic idea of a nonzero sum game is just that there doesn’t have to be a winner and a loser. When you play tennis against somebody, every point is good for one player and bad for the other one. That’s a zero sum game. But if you’re playing doubles, then the relationship between you and the other person on your team is nonzero sum because the point can be good for both of you or bad for both of you. You are in the same boat. Your fortunes are correlated positively. So you can both come out winners—that is, both people on a doubles team—or both be losers. In most real-life situations, what you have is a mixture of nonzero sum

and zero sum dynamics. Rarely are you so completely in the same boat with someone as you would be in doubles tennis. But that’s where the term “nonzero sum” comes from. The main point is that in a nonzero sum game, it’s usually in your self-interest to cooperate with another person, and it is in your self-interest to do something that is good for the other person. Being in a nonzero sum situation is, in a sense, a somewhat cynical basis for moral behavior, which you might consider to be a contradiction. In other words, it’s a reason to worry about the welfare of other people, but it’s a reason that’s grounded ultimately in your own self-interest. For example, one reason you don’t want to launch a nuclear war against Russia and have a bunch of Russians die is because that would probably lead to a bunch of Americans dying. That’s not a really pure form of moral concern but, on the other hand, its practical upshot is to

make the world better off. Its practical consequences are, in many ways, like the consequences of truly moral behavior.

WIE: *One point that you made in *Nonzero* was about the relationship within societies between zero sum and nonzero sum dynamics. Genetic reproduction is always a zero sum game—in other words, one set of genes wins out over the others—and the drive to reproduce one's genes is at the root of so much behavior, animal and human. But, as social or cultural systems become more complex, nonzero sum behaviors often lead to a better outcome overall, making it more likely for more organisms to reproduce.*

RW: Yes. There are a lot of ways that competitive dynamics have cooperative outcomes, or as you said, that zero sum dynamics can give rise to nonzero sumness. One example is certainly found in genetic evolution, if you just look at your genome. Your genome is a team of genes that cooperate in very intricate fashion. The reason they do that is because they are united in playing a cut-throat zero sum game against other organisms, or at least they were doing that during much of evolution. That's the historical reason. So, first of all, at the level of the genome, there are all these nonzero sum cooperative dynamics that are the result of zero sum competition. But then at higher levels, as you suggest, you also get cooperation among organisms that results from competition between groups of organisms.

You see this in cultural evolution as well. One of the main reasons that societies became more complicated and more elaborately cooperative over the last eight or ten thousand years is that they were competing with other societies. Now, what's interesting about the period that we're entering now,

with globalization, is that at the global level of social organization, there's no longer another huge team to compete against. There's no other planet out there that we're going to fight a war with. There still is competition in the world, economic competition and so on. But as far as large, geographically distinct populations fighting against other large, geographically distinct populations, which is a big part of human history, that, I think, or at least hope, is grinding to a halt. In part that is because war is increasingly becoming a nonzero sum game, in the sense of a lose-lose game.

The point is that I think this is all a product of a basic direction of cultural evolution. I think it was in the cards that we would reach this kind of watershed in human history. It's just a very morally and spiritually interesting watershed. What happens next—whether we make big mistakes that lead to global chaos and destruction, or we usher in an era of some harmony—depends largely on whether we accurately perceive the commonality of interest among human beings around the world, and show some interest in their welfare. In that sense, it's a challenge to our level of enlightenment.

More and more, we do have the capacity to blow up or at least ruin the whole world. Our not doing so really depends on just fundamentally getting the picture. So it's a challenge intellectually, as well as morally and spiritually. And I think it's something the world has been driving toward ever since the Stone Age.

WIE: *Why do you feel that it has been in the picture since the Stone Age?*

RW: From assessing the evidence. In *Nonzero*, I make the case that the basic direction of technological evolution has been unstoppable. When you look at these key technological

thresholds, like the invention of writing or the invention of farming, you find that these transitions happened independently multiple times, in societies that were not in touch with one another at the time. Okay, so there seem to have been things that were very likely to get invented. Since taking advantage of these technologies made societies stronger and able to out-compete societies that lacked these technologies, there was a very strong impetus behind the gradual accumulation of these new technologies. It's an empirical question, in that sense. It's an empirical argument I make in the book, that this was in the cards, at least in a statistical sense, in a sense of being highly likely.

WIE: *So you're talking about cultural evolution happening as a result of technological innovation. Is it only due to innovation in technology?*

RW: No, but I think that technology is fundamental, and in that sense—and possibly only in that sense—I'm a little bit of a Marxist. Marx stressed how changes in technology change the relations of economic production, and then other things change in reaction to that. But these other things are what later Marxists called "superstructure," whereas the technology and the relations of production are more fundamental. Those are like infrastructure.

So religion, for example, is something that Marx would consider to be largely a by-product of the deeper technological and economic imperatives. And that I agree with, but it's interesting to me that the technological and economic change has tended to drive religion toward greater and greater inclusion. In other words, we're in a period now where most people, especially in economically modern nations that are interconnected with the whole

world, will say, "I think human beings everywhere have human rights. They deserve respect. They shouldn't be enslaved," and so on. That was not something people were saying ten thousand years ago. That would be an outcome of this historical process, and to me it's a very interesting one. So when I say that religion is a by-product of technological evolution, I don't mean to belittle it. In a way, this outcome is more interesting than technological evolution itself. And it is morally deeper.

Everything changes—religion changes, art changes and so on—but at least in my view, the thing that is fundamental, really, is the technological change. It's not all that's important, but I do think of it as being the prime mover and the thing whose direction is predictable in the most straightforward sense.

The Direction of Evolution

WIE: *You also make the case that organic evolution has a direction.*

RW: Yes, in the sense that I think the evolution of intelligent life—or the evolution of life with an intelligence, something like the human intelligence—was very likely. That's not to say that every lineage gets more and more complex all the time, by any means. But there is enough growth in complexity and intelligence in the ecosystem as a whole that sooner or later I think you are very likely to wind up with a species smart enough to set in motion this second process of cultural evolution in a big way, which is what our species did.

As with the argument about direction in cultural evolution, this is controversial. People disagree about it. But at the same time, there is some factual basis for the argument. For example, multicellular life was

invented independently multiple times, and a number of other key thresholds in the evolution of intelligence were passed through independently more than once. And that's evidence that, sooner or later, they were fairly likely to happen. That's evidence that there was a fairly strong evolutionary dynamic behind them. Of course, you can't go back and replay the tape. We can't conduct the whole several-billion-year-old experiment over again. So the arguments will always be somewhat speculative.

The question is: How likely was it that greater complexity and intelligence would arise? And there I would not just point to the *fact* of the growth of complexity and intelligence. Again, I would say we have to look at the *dynamics* that got us here, and at the thresholds we had to pass through, such as multicellularity. Or little things like the grasping appendage, which was vital to our manipulation of tools, which itself then accelerated the growth of human intelligence. You look at these thresholds and try to figure out, "Why did we pass through them? How likely were we to pass through them? How many different times were these thresholds passed through independently in the course of evolution?" And that's the kind of evidence that I think is most germane to the question of how likely was the growth in complexity and intelligence.

WIE: *And you believe that this entire process—the fact that these thresholds have been repeatedly passed through in evolution to create greater intelligence and greater complexity—occurs as a result of natural selection.*

RW: I think that you can satisfactorily explain this in terms of natural selection, yes. We can even explain something as ephemeral as "love." We do have this genetically based capacity for empathy, for love, for

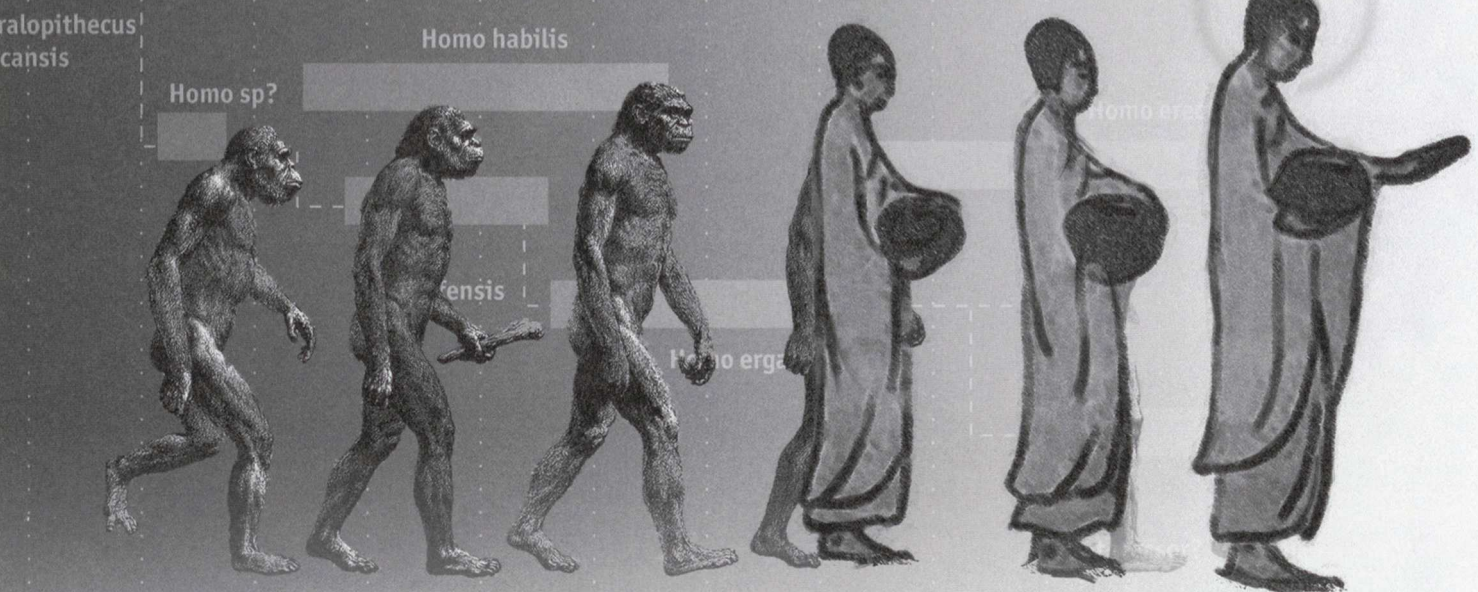
affection, for compassion. The first time this showed up in our lineage is in the love of kin. Then, subsequent to the invention of love, an evolutionary dynamic known as "reciprocal altruism" kicked in. That's what gives us the capacity to feel pretty deep affection for people we're not related to, and to build up bonds of trust with them and feel real compassion and real empathy for them. So, I think there are fewer and fewer fundamental challenges to the theory of natural selection, in that sense.

And, by the way, the dynamic of kin selection, which gave birth to love, is something that has manifested itself repeatedly, independently. So if you accept the idea that a fairly complexly sentient organism was bound to show up sooner or later, you have to include that the likelihood of the evolution of love was fairly high, too. Because in complexly sentient beings, the dynamic of kin selection is manifested in love.

But I'd like to get back to your question. While I think natural selection provides a satisfactory account for this, I do think there is still one massive mystery, and that is why consciousness, or sentience, exists at all, why there is subjective experience. And I don't think many evolutionary biologists appreciate the depth of that mystery; although some great ones do, like John Maynard Smith. The more I say about that, the less progress we'll make. Consciousness is just one of those things that as soon as you start talking about it, all the people who disagree with you get turned off and don't even understand what you're saying, and all the people who already agree with you don't need further enlightenment, so why go on? It's just—

WIE: *Let's go there.*

RW: Well, don't say I didn't warn you.



Well, I'm saying that the direction is at least **suggestive of purpose** but at the same time **I'm conceding that that's all it can be.**

Suggestive is the most it can be because whether something has purpose is just **a very difficult question.**

The Problem of Consciousness

WIE: I found it very intriguing in *Nonzero* that you talk about consciousness as a mystery that science, I think you say, can't solve. It hasn't, certainly.

RW: It certainly hasn't solved the mystery and it's hard to imagine that it would, in part because consciousness doesn't have what scientifically explicable phenomena need, which is public observability. Anything that is to be explained scientifically has to be something that you can point to—point to the physical phenomena and say, "See, I'm predicting that it will behave like this when you do that." Consciousness, by definition, doesn't fall into that category. Now, of course, you can

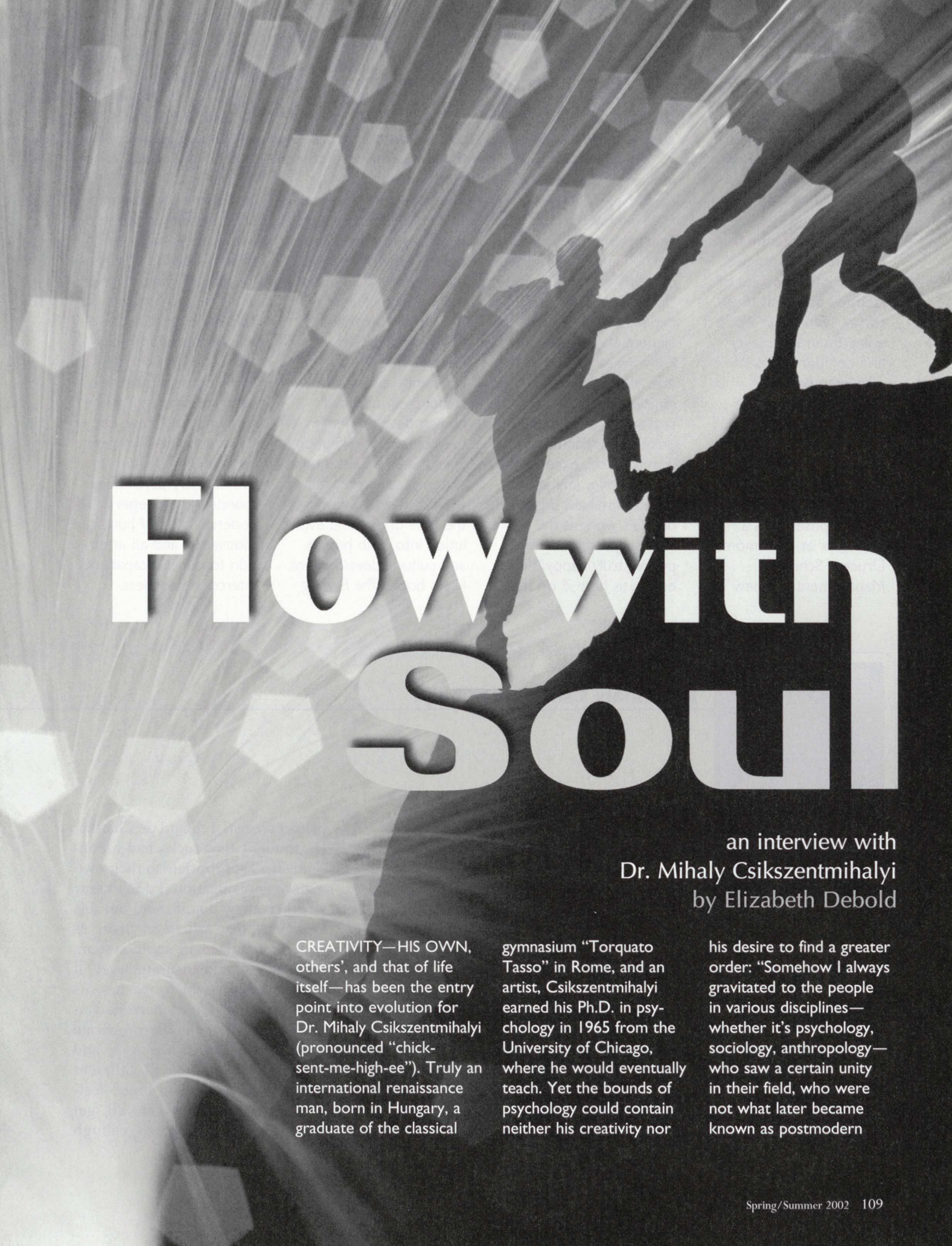
register brain waves and you can do MRIs, and you can look at various physical manifestations of consciousness, but by definition that's not consciousness itself. Consciousness itself is a subjective experience. So it's very hard to imagine how science would really go about tackling the fundamental problem of consciousness. In any event, I certainly don't think it has handled it successfully to date. And there are too many people who are under the impression that science has answered all the important questions in the world or can answer them.

One reason I think it's fascinating that science can't handle this question, at least so far, is that the existence of subjective experience, of consciousness, is the source of all the meaning in the world, so far as I

can tell. If I told you that there was a planet out there that looks just like Earth, and there are these things that look just like people, and they walk around doing exactly the things we do, and they utter phrases and stuff, but they have no subjective experience, it isn't *like anything* to be them. They are zombies. You would probably think, "Well, who cares what happens to that planet?" And I would agree. I would think, "Well, there's really nothing especially immoral about annihilating some of those creatures on that planet because we are not going to cause them any pain by doing that, and we are not going to deprive them of any future happiness or anything. So, who cares?" In my view, the whole basis of meaning and of moral significance is the fact

continued on p. 167





Flow with Soul

an interview with
Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
by Elizabeth Debold

CREATIVITY—HIS OWN, others', and that of life itself—has been the entry point into evolution for Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced "chick-sent-me-high-ee"). Truly an international renaissance man, born in Hungary, a graduate of the classical

gymnasium "Torquato Tasso" in Rome, and an artist, Csikszentmihalyi earned his Ph.D. in psychology in 1965 from the University of Chicago, where he would eventually teach. Yet the bounds of psychology could contain neither his creativity nor

his desire to find a greater order: "Somehow I always gravitated to the people in various disciplines—whether it's psychology, sociology, anthropology—who saw a certain unity in their field, who were not what later became known as postmodern

reductionists," he explained, speaking on the telephone from his office at the Claremont Graduate University. Influenced by Carl Jung and reading widely in religion, Csikszentmihalyi found himself intrigued by "people who kind of stepped back and tried to say, 'What is it that's going on in this messy and confusing pattern of human behavior over time?' And I was influenced greatly, for instance, by Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit who developed this notion of evolution." Even his current position as a professor at Claremont's Drucker School of Management is a new

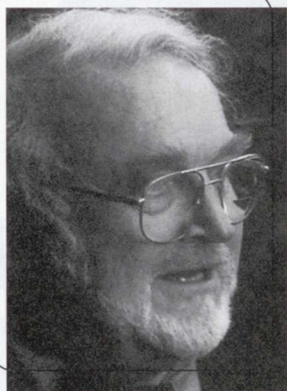
evolutionary turn in a life lived with passion and curiosity.

Csikszentmihalyi is most well known for his bestselling 1990 book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. He defined and explored the concept of "flow"—as in "in the flow"—as our experience of optimal fulfillment and engagement. Flow, whether in creative arts, athletic competition, engaging work, or spiritual practice, is a deep and uniquely human motivation to excel, exceed, and triumph over limitation. Csikszentmihalyi describes his life's work as the effort "to study what makes people truly happy." The emphasis here is on the

word "truly"—because to him, happiness is not simply flow nor an emotional state nor even the experience of pleasure. The happiness he points to involves the continual challenge to go beyond oneself as part of something greater than one's own self-interest.

What compelled us to speak to Dr. Csikszentmihalyi was his constantly evolving understanding of individual human development in the context of evolution. Ever the empiricist, he has systematically explored what it means to bring the laws of material evolution into both human and cultural development. In his books *The Evolving*

Self and *Finding Flow*, he develops a moral and ethical perspective on flow as a force of evolution. Integrating the concept of flow with a contemporary understanding of ancient wisdom teachings, he offers a new paradigm for human living rooted in his recognition that human beings now have the unique opportunity—and obligation—to become conscious participants in evolution. In the following interview, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi invites us to join in creating an evolutionary psychology founded in a deeper understanding of human motivation and an attention to our inescapable interconnectedness.



Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

wie: In your books The Evolving Self and Finding Flow, you speak about evolution, particularly about human evolution. Could you define what you mean by "evolution"?

MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI:

At the most abstract level, what I mean by "evolution" is the increasing complexity of matter, which results in increasing possibility for consciousness. Here I'm differing from the view of [French Jesuit

paleontologist] Teilhard de Chardin. He thought that rocks had a consciousness appropriate to their own material organization. I don't know whether they do or not, but his view was that whenever there is matter organized in some system, there is a commensurate level of consciousness, which reaches its apogee in the human nervous system being as it is the most intricate system, where you can code and store information of all different kinds. Smells, sights, inner feelings, and thoughts can all get stored because there is enough



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space, and the units are connected so that you can begin to draw parallels and see similarities and develop cause-and-effect relationships and so forth.

So you have this system that is very complexly organized, very intricately differentiated, and very integrated. Those are the two dimensions of complexity that you always see in evolution: differentiation and integration. Differentiation allows you to use different parts, for instance, different cells in your brain, different neurons to store information. And at the same time, these differentiated cells are connected to each other, or integrated, so that they can talk to each other, so to speak. Okay? They can exchange information. This is one way to talk about evolution: the process by which matter becomes more complex, allowing for more complex consciousness.

Then, of course, we see the results of humans becoming conscious begin to extend outside the body. And that's where we begin to see the evolution of culture, where we are able to store information not just in the brain but also in cave paintings and buildings, and then books and computers, etcetera. That begins to enlarge the amount of information about the universe that we can, in principle, deal with.

But I don't think the direction of evolution is laid down in any sense. We, having become aware of what is going on, have to decide for ourselves to what end this information should be directed and where it should be going. And I think that from the abstract level, the signposts for those decisions are again differentiation and integration. You want a future where people are free to develop whatever unique blueprints they carry in their genes, and you want that freedom to blossom as much as possible, but at the

same time, you want each person to see that they are part of something much greater. That's where the integration comes in—it starts with feeling that you belong to a family, to an ethnic group, to a church and to a nation. But unless you realize that you're also part of all the living systems and the planet—that there is something beyond all of this that we can sense—unless you're part of that, then evolution would not be very successful, as far as I can tell.

WIE: *What kinds of things catalyze evolution?*

MC: That's a good question. In the past, of course, there have been random changes like asteroids hitting the earth, which killed off a certain type of species and then allowed another one to take over. There's also an explanation that would say that it's really entropy that runs evolution, in the sense that all species try to get as much out of the ecosystem as they can, with the least amount of effort. And that would fit with the second law of thermodynamics [that all systems tend to disorder over time]. If there was no entropy, in other words, if things did not tend to decay and dissolve in competition with other forms, then a better form would not necessarily stand out and become widespread. Okay? You could claim, therefore, that it is because this constant competition for survival eliminates the worst forms that better forms are able to be recognized, endorsed, and developed.

For example, here comes someone who, instead of having to run after a deer, can go on a horse. They are expending much less energy getting their deer meat, so the horse becomes suddenly very popular. The Plains Indians in

America adopted horses within a relatively short time of when the Spaniards introduced them. They saw how useful they were, how much energy they could save. And the same with rifles. This principle, I think, applies mostly to technological evolution, to the evolution of tools, the evolution of technologies that are adopted because they defeat entropy to a certain extent. They save you energy; that's why you adopt them. And then, if there is any species that can find a way of getting more energy out of the environment than others with less effort, then that is the species that will have an advantage for a certain period. This is probably the most reductionistic view—that evolution would be based on entropy itself.

I believe in Occam's razor* however, I'm not endorsing this view. I'm just saying this is one way that people have explained how evolution is catalyzed.

WIE: Are there other views that you endorse more?

MC: Well, I can see entropy as being the original impetus for adopting different things, but I think that when we come to humans, who have this consciousness, then a different set of rules begins to apply. And those are the rules that come out of actually reflecting on experience, reflecting on history, on what happens around humans. And that reflection tells you, "Wait a minute, this is not all we can be, this is not all we can do. There are better ways of doing it." And at that point, you have the possibility of getting beyond what you learned before. A lot of art, literature, religion, and philosophy is born out of this need to go beyond what you were before.

Some people say we have been able to reflect on our own thinking for only about three thousand years. Once that happened, the old rules of evolution began to change. We're no longer subject to the determining influence of the genes as much as we were. We are no longer subject to the determining influence of our social/cultural environment as much as we were before. We are no longer determined by entropy as much as we were before. This is a fairly recent step in evolution. Very recent, considering how long it took us to get, let's say, from Lucy [our early Cro Magnon ancestor] to Homer's writing of *The Odyssey*—it was millions of years. Then suddenly, bingo. So this is a very new game. And there are lots of mistakes that we made, that our species is making, but I think it's a tremendous opportunity, too.

WIE: So this new catalyst for evolution is inherent in humans?

MC: I think it's inherent in this particular being that has this way of processing information, that has this very complex brain. And so yes, it is inherent in humans. I don't think anybody put it in us. That's how I would differ from, let's say, a religious interpretation where the assumption is that we have been infused with some form of a soul from outside. Whereas I think what we call "soul" is generated by the complexification of our body, essentially our brain.

When you look at the pre-Christian version of "soul," you see that what they meant wasn't so much a soul that was a different substance infused or injected into the body. It referred to a quality in a person who was able to use surplus energy for the benefit of others, not needing to get it all for himself. I came to the conclusion that



We are
now in the
position of
**being
responsible
for
evolution,**
for life. It's no
longer just a
mindless universe.
I mean, it *is* a
mindless universe,
which has generated
through complexity
a mind that now has
to decide where we
want to go.

*Occam's razor: The philosophical and scientific rule stating that the simplest of two or more competing theories or explanations is preferable.

"soul" is really our way of thinking about not devoting all of one's psychic energy to maximize oneself in any form, whether it's getting comfortable, rich, famous, or wealthy. Some of that energy is also devoted to somebody else's or something else's well-being, or advantage, or goal. So that kind of thing is "soul" as far as I'm concerned. That's the leading edge of evolution, where you don't need to consume all your energy for your own purposes, but you can devote some of that energy for something that will benefit others, including the planet.

Flow for Evolution

WIE: In your research, you have explored what you call "flow," or optimal human experience, as having an important relationship to evolution. Could you explain this?

MC: My hunch is—and, of course, there is no proof of this—that if an organism, a species, learns to find a positive experience in doing something that stretches its ability; in other words, if you enjoy sticking your neck out and trying to operate at your best or even beyond your best, if you're lucky enough to get that combination, then you're more likely to learn new things, to become better at what you're doing, to invent new things, to discover new things. We seem to be a species that has been blessed by this kind of thirst for pushing the envelope. Most other species seem to be very content when their basic needs are taken care of and their homeostatic level has been restored. They have eaten; they can rest now. That's it. But in our nervous system, maybe by chance or at random, an association has been made between pleasure and challenge, or looking for new challenges.

WIE: So we have a relationship between pleasure and the desire to be challenged further?

MC: Yes. Like most species, we have developed connections in our nervous system between eating and pleasure and between sex and pleasure. If we didn't have these connections, we probably wouldn't eat as much or reproduce as much. Survival to a certain extent depends on finding pleasure in those things that are necessary for survival. But when you begin to enjoy things that go beyond survival, then there's more of a chance to transform yourself and to evolve. And since the state that I call "flow" depends on increasing skill and increasing challenge, then it leads toward complexification, which means greater differentiation and integration, of the organism.

WIE: Let's go back to "flow." Could you explain what it is?

MC: I did my doctoral dissertation, back in the early sixties, on young students at the Chicago Art Institute. One thing that I noticed—and I knew also from my own experience—is that when they started painting, they almost fell into a trance. They didn't seem to notice anything, and they just moved as if they were possessed by something inside themselves. When they finished a painting, they would look at it, and they'd feel good for about five or ten minutes and then they'd put the painting away and not look at it much after that. What became important was the next canvas.

And so, obviously, there is something in the process of getting involved with the painting that is so attractive that it overrides almost everything else, except maybe

the need to eat and sleep and go to the bathroom. So I tried to understand what psychologists have written about this kind of thing, this state of complete involvement. And there really wasn't much. So I saw that this was something about human behavior that psychologists have largely neglected. And when they have studied it, they have essentially interpreted it as a means to an end, without looking at it as a motivation in itself.

In the early seventies, I spoke with chess players, rock climbers, musicians, and inner-city basketball players, asking them to describe their experience when what they were doing was really going well. I really expected quite different stories to emerge. But the interviews seemed in many important ways to focus on the same quality of the experience. For instance, the fact that you were completely immersed in what you were doing, that the concentration was very high, that you knew what you had to do moment by moment, that you had very quick and precise feedback as to how well you were doing, and that you felt that your abilities were stretched but not overwhelmed by the opportunities for action. In other words, the challenges were in balance with the skills. And when those conditions were present, you began to forget all the things that bothered you in everyday life, forget the self as an entity separate from what was going on—you felt you were a part of something greater and you were just moving along with the logic of the activity.

Everyone said that it was like being carried by a current, spontaneous, effortless like a flow. You also forget time and are not afraid of being out of control. You think you can control the situation if you need to. But it's hard because

the challenges are hard. It feels effortless and yet it's extremely dependent on concentration and skill. So it's a paradoxical kind of condition where you feel that you are on a nice edge, between anxiety on the one hand and boredom on the other. You're just operating on this fine line where you can barely do what needs to be done.

Since then, colleagues have interviewed by now ten thousand people around the world—women who weave tapestries in the highlands of Borneo, meditating monks in Europe, also Catholic Dominican monks, and so forth. They all said these same things. So “flow” seems to be a phenomenological state that is the same across cultures. What people do to get into that state varies enormously, but the experience itself is described in very similar ways.

WIE: *So do you see flow as a positive force for evolution?*

MC: From the point of view of the individual, it's a very positive experience because it does provide the most memorable, intense enjoyment in life. But, it's not a simple story because there are two dangers with flow in terms of development or evolution. One is that at the individual level it can become addictive to the point that a person becomes increasingly dependent on one set of challenges, and when those challenges are exhausted, the person is left helpless. For instance, one thing that has always struck me is how many of the great chess masters broke down into various forms of neurosis after they beat everybody else in the world and there was nowhere else to go. So that's one danger, at the individual level—that you stunt your development as a person.

At the social level, the danger

is that you end up finding flow in challenges that are zero sum, that is, that somebody has to lose for you to win. For instance, war can produce flow if you are on the front line, and everything is clear, everything is focused, and you know exactly what you want to do, and so forth. So many people come back from war to find civilian life very boring and dull compared to their front line experience.

WIE: *So how does flow work to further evolution?*

MC: In a sense, flow is what drives this human need for going beyond what we have. In creativity or optimal experience, I have found that it is always a struggle, and the struggle has to do with essentially opening yourself up and yet delving deeply into yourself. Here are these two processes—differentiation and integration—which have to go hand in hand for complexity to evolve. So I see flow as a very important dynamic in the evolution of complexity. It gives you the incentive, the motivation, the reward for going beyond what you have. But it does not give you an ethical direction, so I would say it has to be flow with soul.

Evolving Complexity

WIE: *You speak about the goal of evolution as greater complexity. Can you say more about what that means?*

MC: Yes. That's a very contested point because some people say, “Wait a minute. Yes, it's true that complexity does increase with time, but then so do a lot of simple things, and maybe in the next turn of the dice it will be cockroaches that will survive, because we will annihilate ourselves,” and so forth.

WIE: *Yes, that's the view presented by paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould and others—*

MC: Right. I'll make two points. First, it's certainly not the case that complexity across the board is necessarily increasing because complexity is not like a tide that lifts everything up. But if you take a cross section of life on this earth, let's say every few hundred thousand years, the more recent the slice is, the more you will find some complex animals or organisms there. So you ask: What is the pattern of change over time? Looking at these cross sections, the only thing that you can clearly say is that you find more complex organisms at each cross section. Not that every organism is more complex, not that every organism is always successful, but somehow, over time, you find that this type of complexity is evolving.

But there is a second point that is probably the more important one. Now that we are conscious of evolution, now that we are aware of what the heck is going on, and we know what entropy is like and we know what complexity of consciousness is like, then we naturally have to make a choice. If we had to determine a goal for our evolution, I think that complexity would be the goal that we would endorse. And by virtue of this very fact, complexity would be the goal of evolution.

WIE: *Why do you have faith in complexity as being the way to evolve?*

MC: Because I like Mozart, I like Villard's sketches of Chartres, I like to understand what the scientists are finding out about the world, I like hot and cold running water. I may be wrong, but for whatever reason, through all experience,

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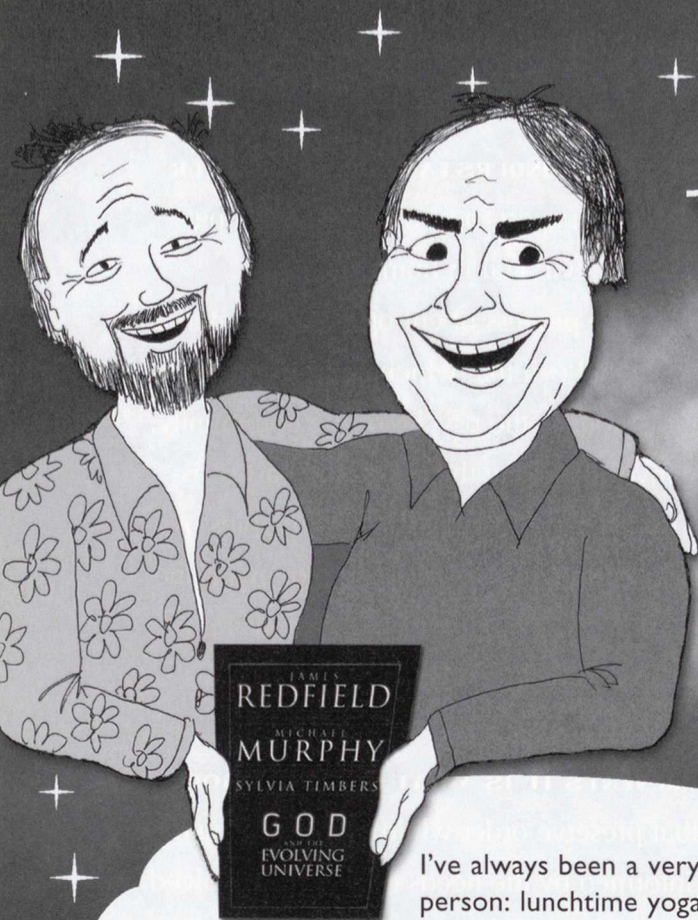


"CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF MATTER and energy also suggests a new way of thinking about good and evil. Evil in human affairs is analogous to the process of entropy in the material universe. We call evil that which causes pain, suffering, disorder in the psyche or the community. It usually involves taking the course of least resistance, or operating according to the principles of a lower order of organization.... Entropy or evil is the default state, the condition to which systems return unless work is done to prevent it.

"WHAT PREVENTS IT IS WHAT WE CALL 'GOOD'— actions that preserve order while preventing rigidity, that are informed by the needs of the most evolved systems. Acts that take into account the future, the common good, the emotional well-being of others. Good is the creative overcoming of inertia, the energy that leads to the evolution of human consciousness. To act in terms of new principles of organization is always more difficult, and requires more effort and energy. The ability to do so is what has been known as virtue....

"HELL IN THIS SCENARIO IS SIMPLY THE separation of the individual from the flow of life. It is clinging to the past, to the self, to the safety of inertia. There is a trace of this sense in the root of the word for 'devil': it comes from the Greek *dia bollein*, to separate or break asunder. What is diabolical is to weaken the emerging complexity by withdrawing one's psychic energy from it."

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
Finding Flow

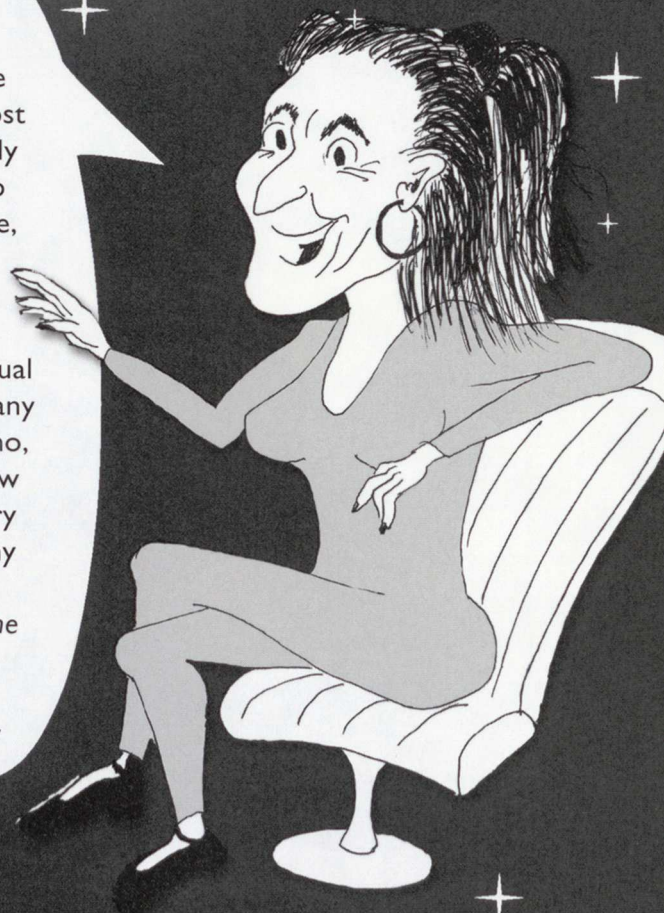


a meeting of the Minds

with Stacey Heartspring

I've always been a very spiritual person: lunchtime yoga classes, weekend retreats, past life regressions.

But nothing I've ever done compares with what we're about to do now, dear readers. You see, as the latest addition to the staff of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, I was just chosen to host the first temporally free, trans-dialectical discussion in our newly completed "Fourth Dimension Conference Room." And I keep asking myself, could this *really* be happening? I mean, imagine me, Stacey Heartspring, from suburban New Jersey, transcending time and space, entering this new state-of-the-art conference room in the fourth-dimensional vacuum between nothing and something, having the awesome privilege of meeting all my spiritual idols there, in person, and as their host, being able to ask them any question I want! Sure, I've had lots of spiritual experiences but no, nothing can possibly compare with the thrill I'm having right now in being able to welcome you, our readers, to this extraordinary event. Today, I am honored to be speaking with Michael Murphy and James Redfield, two of the spiritual world's most popular authors, about their new book, *God and the Evolving Universe: The Next Step in Personal Evolution*. And because here in the fourth dimension, we can invite anyone to join us for our unique interdenominational investigations—even if they are no longer embodied on the physical plane—for all you readers out there, I have some surprise guests up my sleeve!



A review of *God and the Evolving Universe: The Next Step in Personal Evolution* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2002)
by James Redfield, Michael Murphy, and Sylvia Timbers



STACEY: Michael and James, thanks so much for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here. You are our inaugural interviewees, and on behalf of *What Is Enlightenment?*, I'm thrilled to welcome you! As you may know, our spiritually advanced super-engineers just made it possible for us to invite any of our favorite spiritual personalities to join our panel discussion, including those who are not presently "in the body," as it were.

JAMES: Really!?

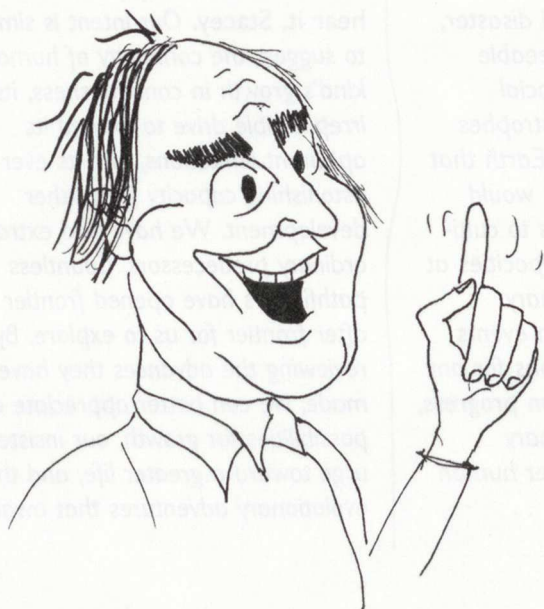
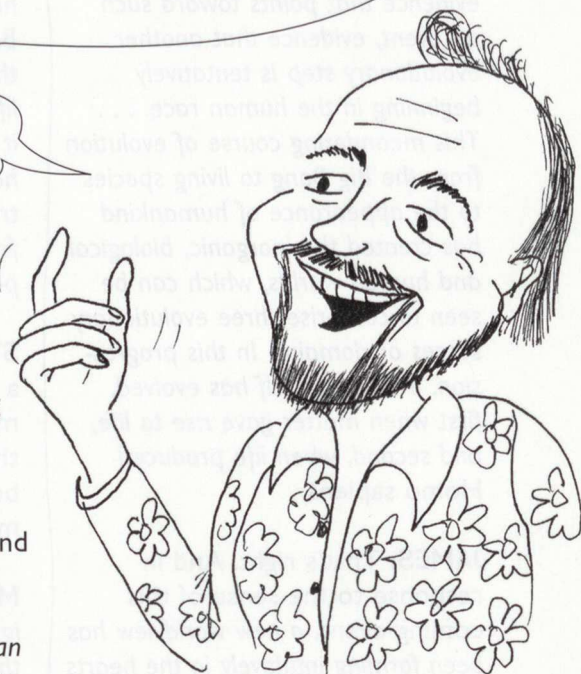
STACEY: Yes! Isn't that fantastic! And some very notable friends of ours will be dropping by soon. I'm sure you'll recognize them.

JAMES: I can't wait!

STACEY: Neither can I! But first, let me begin by saying that your book really hit me. Evolution is such a hot topic these days. And when I saw the title, I thought, wow, maybe this book can help me understand what spiritual transformation is really all about. For a long time now, I have been

wondering, am I evolving?! What's next for me on my spiritual path? In fact, where are we all going from here? So, can you begin by explaining how your book might answer some of these questions?

JAMES: *Our aim in writing God and The Evolving Universe is twofold. First, we want to add depth to the popular understanding of our human potential by discussing a wide range of capabilities and experiences that are now available to us, all of which can be more readily sustained through disciplined intention and practice.*



MICHAEL: And second, we want to suggest that a widespread actualization of these capacities would herald the dawning of a new evolutionary step—a step as significant as the emergence of life from inorganic matter and the rise of humanity from the first tiny cells, a step that would bless us with spectacular new abilities and levels of experience.

STACEY: Incredible! The emergence of life out of inorganic matter. . . ? I always knew I had potential!

MICHAEL: Evolution, we believe, is possibly en route to a stupendous transition. In this book, we present evidence that points toward such an event, evidence that another evolutionary step is tentatively beginning in the human race. . . . This meandering course of evolution from the Big Bang to living species to the appearance of humankind has created the inorganic, biological, and human worlds, which can be seen to comprise three evolutionary stages or domains. In this progression, evolution itself has evolved, first when matter gave rise to life, and second, when life produced Homo sapiens.

JAMES: That's right. And in response to the sense of this coming event, a new worldview has been forming intuitively in the hearts and minds of people around the world. Though this emerging picture of our place in the universe has not been fully articulated, it is based on a central perception that we have capacities for a greater life than most of us have realized—a life that seems essentially joined with the evolution of the universe itself. We sense this connection, many believe, because we and the world are unfolding from the same transcendent source and are secretly moved to manifest more and more of our latent divinity.

STACEY: Boy, it sure helps to think that my source is transcendent, that there is, what did you call it? . . . oh, yeah, a “latent divinity” inside me, not to mention in the universe.

MICHAEL: Yes, Stacey, and evolution has clearly demonstrated many kinds of progress. . . . At the core of this book is our belief that the universe has a telos, a fundamental tendency to manifest its latent divinity. . . . If this universal tendency does indeed exist, it must have been operating from the Big Bang through the development of the inorganic world to the advent of life and human consciousness. And it must be with us still. Humans have long sensed that something transcendent calls us on, often framing their intuition in myth, poetry, or philosophic speculation.

STACEY: With the world in such a mess, there's nothing I'd love more to hear you say, Michael, than that everything is going to be okay. It would definitely help me sleep better.

MICHAEL: But given human ignorance, free will, and perversity, this advance is not guaranteed. . . . At all its levels, the evolving universe has been filled with both narrow escapes and long periods of time that give no evidence of lasting advance.

The same principle holds for the evolutionary possibilities we are exploring here. Ecological disaster, cataclysmic war, unforeseeable diseases, extraordinary social upheavals, or other catastrophes could so diminish life on Earth that few people or institutions would have the will or resources to cultivate the extraordinary capacities at the heart of the evolutionary advance we foresee. Such events could destroy the conditions for any kind of widespread human progress, let alone a third evolutionary transcendence. . . . Further human advance depends on us. . . .

STACEY: Uh oh! Is there hope then? I mean, most of the disasters you mention are our fault! According to you, our very evolution is at stake! What can we do?

JAMES: Evolution entered a new domain with the appearance of humankind. Intelligence, communication skills, and other attributes of animal life advanced dramatically as our species formed newly creative social groups, harnessed fire, developed new tools, learned to speak, and tried to make greater sense of the world around them. As their capacities developed, our ancestors awoke to the Transcendent and began to advance toward the truth of their higher nature. This evolution began in the Stone Age and accelerated during the civilized era . . . preparing us . . . for still another evolutionary leap.

STACEY: So, you mean I'm not alone in this? Boy, I'd sure like to think that my spiritual journey is supported by people from the Stone Age. Up until now, it's just been my Aunt Beryl and a few close friends. I mean, that's really encouraging!

MICHAEL: I'm very pleased to hear it, Stacey. Our intent is simply to suggest the continuity of humankind's growth in consciousness, its irrepressible drive to exceed its apparent limitations, and its ever-astonishing capacity for further development. We have had extraordinary predecessors. Countless pathfinders have opened frontier after frontier for us to explore. By reviewing the advances they have made, we can better appreciate our possibilities for growth, our insistent urge toward a greater life, and the evolutionary adventures that await us.

STACEY: Very inspiring! But what about my human potential? I really want to find out how I can participate in all this. I mean, I've already done quite a few workshops. But my intuition tells me that I have a lot of human potential still bottled up inside me! I think I need some concrete advice here.

JAMES: Since the early nineteenth century, scientists and scholars have produced a wide range of discoveries, which, taken as a whole, make up the largest body of publicly available knowledge about extraordinary human functioning that has ever existed on Earth. . . .

We . . . explore these kinds of extraordinary human experience, with descriptions of how they make their appearance and practices to establish them more consistently in our everyday life. . . .

Our capacity for luminous perception and mystical knowing;

our powers of volition; our abilities to communicate; our vitality; and our very identity can blossom into the greater life many of us sense in moments of inspiration. It is our deep conviction that we can cultivate these emergent capacities so that they will manifest in our lives with a deeper love, purpose, and synchronistic flow.

STACEY: Oh, I just love flow . . .

MICHAEL: And, taken as a whole, the extraordinary experiences described in the book seem to form a pattern. When viewed in their entirety, they appear to be attributes of a single but many-sided nature pressing to be born in us. Each of them, it seems, points toward—and carries the seed of—a greater integration. The expanded perceptions, movement-abilities, energies, and other capacities described in this book call us toward a more inclusive and abundant nature overflowing with joy, meaning, and purpose. . . .

Human nature, we believe, is meant for integral transformation.

The winds of grace are blowing for all of our attributes, but we must raise a sail large enough to catch them.

JAMES: Yes, Michael, and I believe that a sense of the world's stupendous advance can inspire and lend perspective to all our works, especially when they are supported by transformative disciplines. . . . We . . . suggest some ways in which the realization of our greater capacities and the perspective it gives us can contribute to the world's evolutionary progress. . . .

We believe that the integration of these attributes, and the sense of inspired flow they produce, can make our efforts of reform more heartfelt and effective.

STACEY: Thanks so much, Michael and James. I feel a lot more enlightened about evolution and how I can participate in it. You've really helped me understand what your new book is all about . . . Oh, please excuse me, I think one of human history's pioneers of consciousness has just arrived.



Hello, Master Gautama, it's been too many lifetimes since we've seen you on earth! You look great—much better than your statues! We were just talking about pathfinders and here you are. You call that “co-arising,” don't you? As founder of Buddhism and one of the greatest spiritual teachers of all time, would you like to comment on this new book about evolution and human potential?

GAUTAMA: Hi, Stacey. You haven't quite gotten off the wheel yet but, hey, it's great to see you, too. Congratulations on your new job. And good to meet you, James and Michael. Let me begin by telling you a little story: When I was a young man, at the beginning of my life, I looked at nature and saw that all things are subject to decay and death and thus to sorrow. The thought came to me that I myself was of such a nature.



I was the same as all created things. I too would be subject to disease, decay, death, and sorrow. But what if I were to search for that which underlies all becoming. . . .

In this way, finally, a knowledge and insight arose, and I knew that this was the changeless, the unconditioned. This was freedom. . . .

You are caught on the endless wheel of becoming this or that, sinking and floating in that sea of endless becoming. Awaken yourself now to your own bright mind.

STACEY: Are you actually saying that we've been expressing ignorance and unenlightenment? Are you saying that our conversation about evolution, or "becoming" as you call it, is completely deluded?

GAUTAMA: That's absolutely what I am saying. I advise you: Do not let consciousness dwell on the products of existence and things that come and go, for there is no rest or relief there. When you understand that by taking the objects of the world for granted as total reality,

you are tied to the world, then this understanding will release you from your dependence on objects and will stop your craving and your desire for constant becoming.

STACEY: Would you, James or Michael, like to respond? I mean, I'd love to find out if any new insights into these matters have been revealed during the last twenty-five hundred years.

MICHAEL: Certainly, Stacey. Buddhism has often gone beyond the insights of its founder and early practitioners—

GAUTAMA: Excuse me!?

MICHAEL: Gautama, I'd like to finish, please. Buddhism has often gone beyond the insights of its founder and early practitioners, and in so doing it has become an immense repository of liberating practices and insights about our greater potentials.

JAMES: Meditation, for example, can simultaneously calm the mind, promote hormonal balance, sharpen thought, release the imagination, lift the emotions, help strengthen volition, and open ways to greater states of consciousness.

GAUTAMA: Hormonal balance? What is hormonal?

STACEY: Hormones! I studied hormones in college. They make the body—

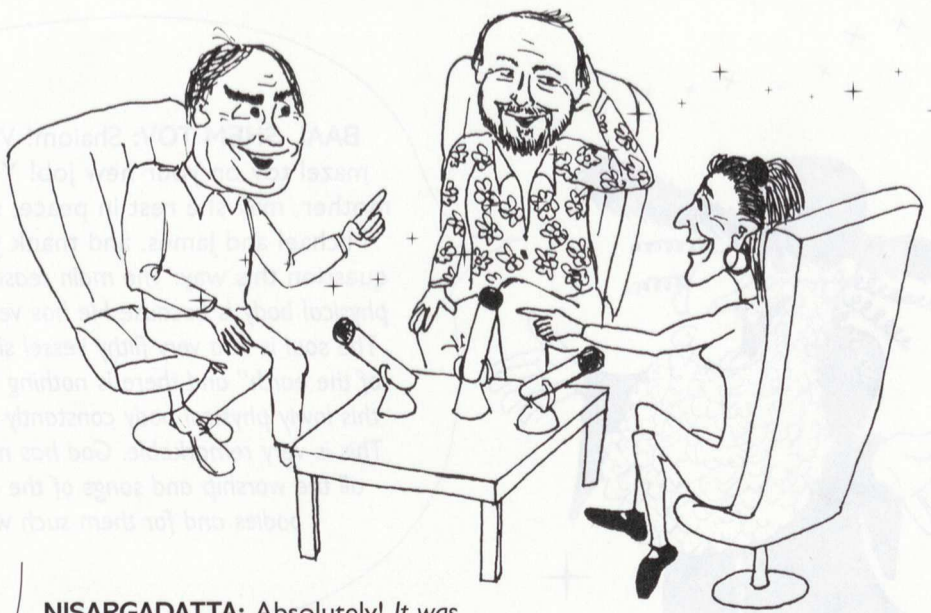
GAUTAMA: Listen closely! Those people who conceive of a self see it usually in one of several ways. They think of the body as a self, or as the self having a body, or they see the body as part of the self, or the self as included in the body. But in all these ways the feeling of "I am" is never abandoned, for people do not see the arising and falling and the way of conditions but regard the body and self as solid entities.



STACEY: Speaking of the body, is it just me, or is it getting hot in here? Oh, there's the doorbell. (Thank God!) Please excuse me. Oh, hello, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj! Namaste.



NISARGADATTA: Namaste, Stacey. It's wonderful to see you in the fourth dimension. Did Leela tell you I was planning to take form here today and take the opportunity to visit with you all?



STACEY: Yes, I saw her yesterday at our lunchtime yoga class. Thanks a lot for making it, Sri Nisargadatta. It's fantastic to actually see you! So, just to fill you in—on the one hand, Master Gautama believes that only when I get off the wheel of becoming will I be released from suffering. On the other hand, James and Michael are saying that I'm already divine, you know, in a latent way, and that this divinity is being revealed through the evolutionary process, which includes me. As one of the most renowned teachers of Advaita Vedanta in the modern era, could you help us out here?

NISARGADATTA: I'd be very happy to. But, in essence, I agree with Gautama. *By its very nature the world is painful and transient. See it as it is and divest yourself of all desire and fear. When the world does not hold and bind you, it becomes an abode of joy and beauty. You can be happy in the world only when you are free of it.*

GAUTAMA: Man, am I glad you arrived, Sri. These are just the kinds of co-arising events I count on! *This condition you are describing I call neither arising nor passing away, neither dying nor being born. It is without form and without change. It is eternal, which never originates and never passes away. To find it is the end of sorrow.*

NISARGADATTA: Absolutely! *It was the same ten thousand years ago, (even before you got on the wheel, Gautama!), and will be the same ten thousand years hence. Centuries roll on, but the human problem does not change—the problem of suffering and the ending of suffering.*

STACEY: Look, if anyone wants to be freed from suffering, it's me, but do I have to give up on evolution, too? I mean, I was just starting to really get interested in it. And what about my human potential? I mean, I definitely think I have a lot of potential. I can just feel it! But from the way you're speaking, Sri and Gautama, you're making me wonder if evolution is even real? And if it's not, what now? I'm starting to feel a little lost. James and Michael, can you provide some perspective on this?

MICHAEL: I'd be pleased to, and will do so by putting this into an historical perspective. *While the great seers of Asia and most philosophers of Greece saw life on Earth as an endless round, a place from which the liberated soul escaped, the Jews began to see it as a journey toward better things. . . . The idea that there is a*

transcendent purpose in world events was prevalent in Judaism for the first time among an entire people. . . .

Time was an arrow, not an endless cycle. . . .

Judaism was the first religion to assert that not only the human soul but the world as a whole is on a cosmic journey. This is in sharp contrast with Eastern and ancient Greek notions of cyclical history.

STACEY: "Time is an arrow." I like it. You know, I didn't realize the Jews were responsible for that insight—and they're actually my ancestors! I know—I'm going to take advantage of my personal connections and arrange for immediate transport of the Baal Shem Tov, the revered mystic and founder of the Hasidic movement—a man eminently qualified to speak to us about this view. Ah, here he is now . . . isn't transcending space and time awesome! Shalom, Revered Rebbe, and welcome to our discussion. Could you please help us by answering the question: So, why are we here anyway?



BAAL SHEM TOV: Shalom! Wonderful to see you, Stacey, and mazel tov on your new job! Your great-great-great-grandmother, may she rest in peace, sends her love from Krakow. Hello, Michael and James, and thank you for your work. I'll answer the question this way: *The main reason that God sends the soul to this lowly physical body is because He has very great pleasure and delight from this. The soul is in a very filthy vessel since man was created out of the "dust of the earth" and there is nothing lower and less spiritual than dust. Still, this lowly physical body constantly gives praise and thanks to its Creator. This is very remarkable. God has more delight from this praise than from all the worship and songs of the angels. The angels do not have gross bodies and for them such worship is not at all remarkable.*

STACEY: Maybe it's because I'm Jewish, but boy, is that beautiful! Thank you very much, Rebbe. Your words warm my heart and bring me right back to the ancestral home on Long Island. Would anyone like to respond?

GAUTAMA: With all due respect, Mr. Tov, you know the Jews are entirely given to the material world and the pleasures of the senses. [And] the one who gives himself entirely to sense pleasures. . . gives up the real for the pleasant. . . Do not cling to the pleasant, much less to the unpleasant. Losing that which you love brings suffering; harboring the pain of your loss brings more pain.

BAAL SHEM TOV: Gautama, the Divine Presence is in all things. My dear great-grandson, the Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav, used to say, "How wonderful it would be if one could only be worthy of hearing the song of the grass. Each blade of grass sings out to God without any ulterior motive and without

expecting any reward. . . The best place to meditate is in the meadows outside the city. One should meditate in a grassy field, for grass will awaken the heart."

STACEY: James, my friends and I all loved your outrageously popular book, *The Celestine Prophecy*. And having read it, I have an intuition you might want to jump in here.

JAMES: You're right, Stacey. Just like you, I love what the Baal Shem is saying! And, as I said in my book *The Tenth Insight*, the earth gives us energies that can guide us.

MICHAEL: Yes, and do you know how far your perceptions can reach into the world around you? . . . Numerous studies of extraordinary experience and transformative practice show that we can vastly improve our vision, refine our hearing, develop our ability to sense things through touch, enhance our sense of smell, refine our internal body

awareness, and cultivate extrasensory abilities. . .

In our book we . . . explore these kinds of extraordinary human experience, with descriptions of how they make their appearance and practices to establish them more consistently in our everyday life. . .

When such experiences are viewed in their entirety, they . . . reveal a greater nature pressing to be born in us.

NISARGADATTA: I must disagree, Sir. You already have all the experience you need. . . You need not gather any more, rather you must go beyond experience. Whatever effort you make, whatever method you follow, will merely generate more experience, but will not take you beyond. . . If you expect any benefits from your search, material, mental, or spiritual, you have missed the point.

MICHAEL: I really have to back James up here. I suggest, Sri Nisargadatta, that you think of these experiences not as isolated

events but as the birth of a new way of apprehending the world. . . . And there is overwhelming evidence that systematic long-term practice can facilitate the actualization of all our emergent abilities. . . .

The extraordinary abilities we discuss . . . though fully evident now in relatively few people, are accessible to all. They reflect a part of human nature not yet actualized which, we believe, can become the norm for every human being.

GAUTAMA: Don't worry, Sri, I'll back you up because I detest and will not undertake so-called miracles of magic power and divination. I and my followers attract nonbelievers only by the miracle of truth.

JAMES: This is truth! There is no better place to start than with science and the mystery of evolution. . . .

Evolution's discovery confirmed the sense of time's arrow that arose among the Jews . . . and must be addressed by anyone who views the world as a whole and cares about humankind's destiny. . . .

NISARGADATTA AND GAUTAMA: Hmmmph!


MICHAEL: Yes, James. Science has enjoyed no greater triumph than the discovery of evolution. . . .

And a comprehensive science of the human potential has been developing for more than a century and a half, rendering debates about the

antagonisms between science and religion, or between body, mind, and soul, increasingly out-of-date. Powerful evidence of our latent capacities has been gathered, studied, and incorporated into more and more programs for human growth.

JAMES: And we propose that our emergent capacities, which alter our physical functioning to some degree whenever they make their appearance, can gradually give rise to a new and more luminous embodiment.

(. . . did I hear you say luminous embodiment?)



STACEY: What was *that*? Who's there? Oh, it's The Mother, Sri Aurobindo's co-avatar and an evolutionary pioneer and master occultist in her own right. How are you? You've gained weight, haven't you? You know, after your ascent to join Sri Aurobindo, one of the greatest spiritual visionaries of all time, I wasn't sure if you'd be able to make it from the Subtle Physical Plane to be with us. I see our discussion about luminous embodiment piqued your interest, even *there*. Thank you very much for descending. Would you like to comment on the topic of evolution?

THE MOTHER:

I'd be happy to. James and Michael, I agree with you. A new world is born. It is not the old world that is changing. It is a new world which is born. And we are right in the middle of the transition period, when the two overlap, when the old is still all-powerful and entirely controlling the ordinary consciousness. But the new slips in, still very modest and unnoticed—so unnoticed that externally it disturbs hardly anything. . . . But it is working, it is growing.



MICHAEL: Thank you, Mother. I'm so deeply moved to be in your presence again. You look even more radiant than the last time we met in the late 1950s. To our way of thinking, the evidence suggests that a new evolutionary domain is tentatively forming in the human race. This emerging domain, like the emergence of life from inorganic matter and humankind from animal species, has been made possible by countless advances large and small, from the birth of spiritual awareness among our ancient ancestors to recent scientific discoveries about our still mostly untapped capacities for extraordinary life.

THE MOTHER: Yes, absolutely. And each time a new element is introduced among existing combinations, it creates a tearing of the limits, we could say. . . . The perceptions of modern science undoubtedly come much closer to expressing the next reality than, say, those of the Stone Age. But even they will be suddenly completely outdated, surpassed and probably made obsolete by the introduction of something that did not exist in the universe we have studied. It is that change, that sudden alteration of the universal

element which will most certainly bring a sort of chaos into our perceptions, from which a new knowledge will emerge.

STACEY: Fascinating . . . What I'm really curious about, though, is how I can become luminous myself and have all these other extraordinary experiences you've been hinting at.

THE MOTHER: Stacey, I understand that you're intrigued. I can describe one experience I had when the entire body became a single, extremely rapid and intense vibration, but motionless. I don't know how to explain it because it wasn't moving in space and yet it was a vibration . . . but it was motionless in space. It was in the body, as if each cell had a vibration and there was but a single block of vibrations.


STACEY: James?

JAMES: That's incredible! Yes. . . beliefs in psychophysical transmutation express an intuition that the body cannot only transcend the world's vicissitudes but grow into a more luminous entity that shares

the soul's ecstasy and liberation. Humans . . . have, since the Stone Age, sensed the body's capacity to live in ever-closer alignment with the Transcendent, thus acquiring new freedom from the elements, new capacities for earthly activities, and a joyous, life-giving radiance.

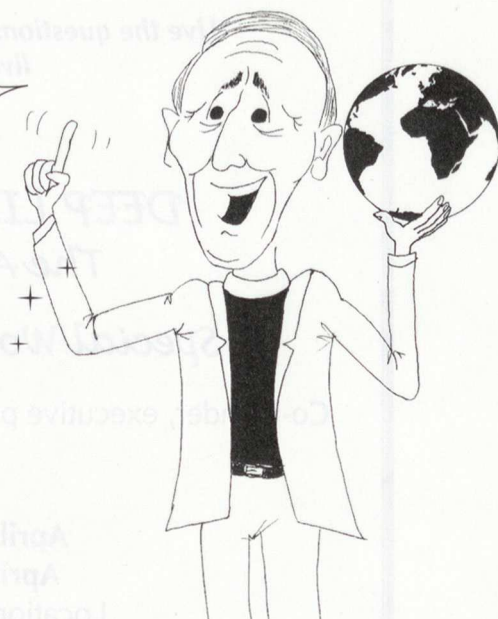
NISARGADATTA: I must demur! Experience, however sublime, is not the real thing. By its very nature it comes and goes. Self-realization is not an acquisition. . . . To try to perpetuate a flash of insight or a burst of happiness is destructive of what it wants to preserve. What comes must go. The permanent is beyond all comings and goings. Go to the root of all experience, to the sense of being. Beyond being and not-being lies the immensity of the real.

GAUTAMA: What a relief to hear you speak, Sri! Can't they see that when you take things, it is because of a thirst, a clinging, and a grasping. . . . It makes no difference what it is you are grasping. When you grasp, you are losing your freedom. Realize this and grasp at nothing. Then you will cease being a creature of attachment, tied to the power of death.



STACEY: Hey, everyone, our last guest has just arrived. Father Teilhard de Chardin, *bonjour*, and welcome! Thank you so much for traveling all the way from the Omega Point. You look a little tired. Here, have a cup of tea. Please sit down. I'm really counting on you because I have a sense we're a bit stuck here. Science and spirituality; evolution and cessation; body and mind; being and becoming; everything and nothing. What can you add?

TEILHARD: *Merci, Stacey, merci. I am honored to contribute to this evolutionary discussion! There finally emerges in . . . human consciousness, for the first time since the awakening of life on earth, the fundamental problem of Action. No longer only, as in the past, for our small selves, for our small family, our small country, but for the salvation and the success of the Universe. . . . In terms of human experience, human energy presents itself to our view as the terms of a vast process in which the whole mass of the universe is involved. In us, the evolution of the world towards spirit becomes conscious. Our perfection, our interest and our salvation as elements of creation can only be to press on with this evolution with all our strength.*



STACEY: Oh, that's a relief. I usually think only about me and my evolution. But my evolution for "the success of the universe." . . . Wow! I mean, that's *big*! Michael, would you like to respond?

MICHAEL: I couldn't agree more that we must pursue evolution with everything we have. For example, my old friend George Leonard and I have outlined an *integral transformative practice similar to the kind we are proposing here; it describes the use of affirmations . . . which focus our best conscious efforts on transformation while seeking to enlist powers beyond our conscious understanding. . . .*

To take an example: Say you're a person who is often too busy or preoccupied to consider other people's feelings. You want to develop more empathy. Your affirmation could be "I enjoy a profound empathy for other people that sometimes appears to be telepathic. . . ."

Such affirmations can be practiced through words, images, emotions, and deliberate acts. And they are real. If firmly held, they become more than "figments of the imagination" as they exert real energies for change.

TEILHARD: I appreciate your emphasis on empathy and care for others. But let me put it this way: *Gloriously situated by life at this critical point in the evolution of Mankind, what ought we to do? We hold the earth's future in our hands. What shall we decide? . . .*

The more I consider the fundamental question of the future of the earth, the more it appears to me that the generative principle of its unification is finally to be sought. . . in the last resort, through the meeting, center to center, of human [beings], such as can only be realized in universal, mutual love.

STACEY: Oh, that's just wonderful, Father! I couldn't have said it better myself. And on that note, as host of the new *What Is Enlightenment?* Fourth Dimension Conference Room, I, Stacey Heartspring, want to thank you all for participating in what has certainly turned out to be an evolutionary event! And while we are transcending the limits of space and time to be here, it's still quite a trip home for most of you, so I'd love to invite you all for a meal before you go.

I'm ordering out for pizza. Is that okay with everyone?

GAUTAMA: What's pizza?

NISARGADATTA: It's sort of like *chapati*, you know, flat bread.

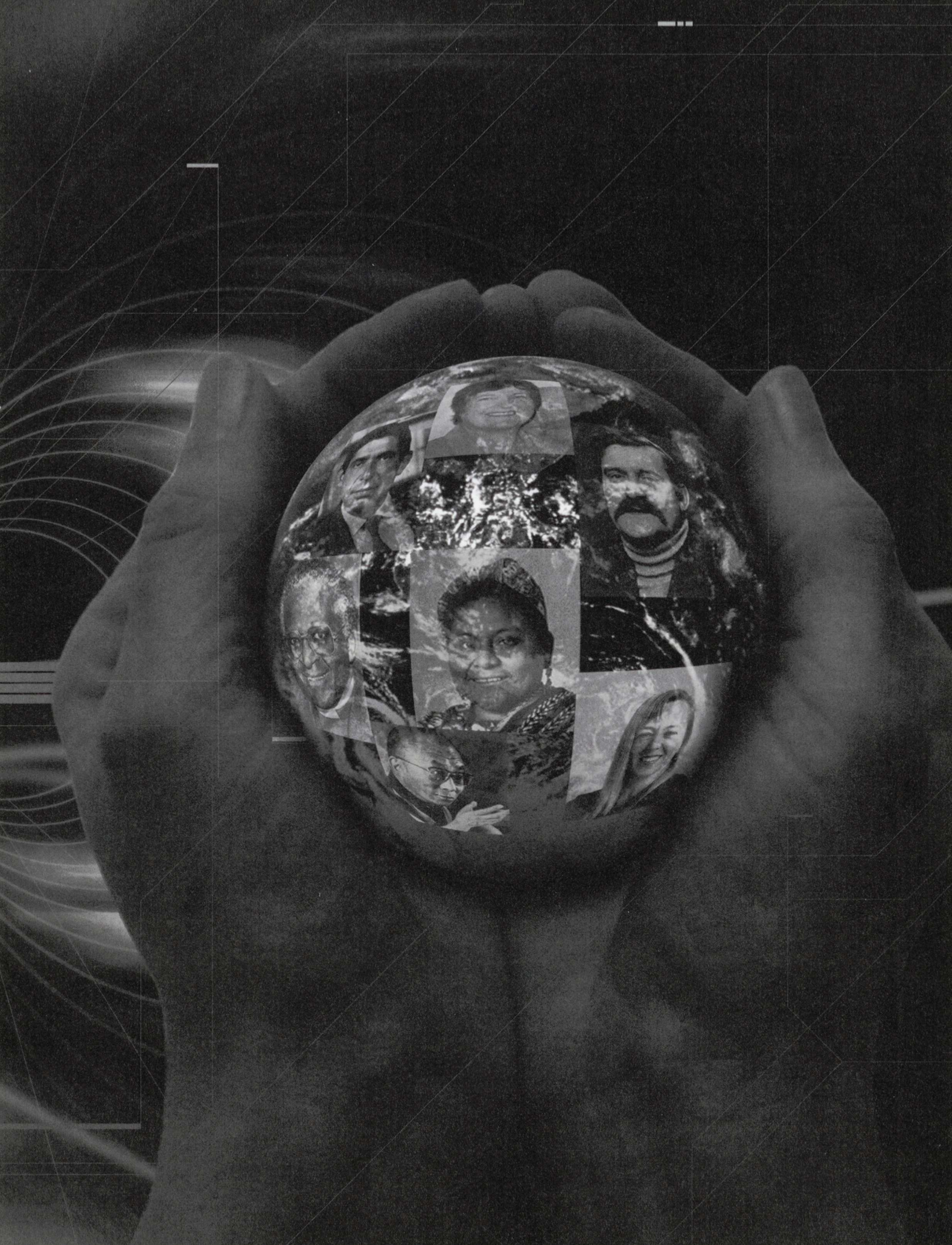
BAAL SHEM TOV: No, it's more like a bagel with cream cheese.

THE MOTHER: Pizza will definitely work against the evolution of my cells. I'll pass. . . .

MICHAEL AND JAMES: Stacey, we'd love to stay around, but we're already late for a book signing.

GAUTAMA: *Men, driven on by thirst, run about like a snared hare. . . .*

STACEY: Oh, Gautama, let's just wish them well. Michael and James, thank you so much for joining us, and good luck with your new book. I'm sure it's going to be a great success. ■



for the sake of the future

7 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Speak About their Hopes for Humanity's Next Step

WHAT WOULD NOBEL Peace Prize laureates have to say about spiritual evolution? How would these warriors for peace, these pragmatic idealists, describe humanity's next evolutionary step? Does their vision of the transformation of the world involve a spiritual dimension?

Last winter, *WIE* journeyed to the pristine wintry city of Oslo, Norway, for the Nobel Peace Prize Centennial Symposium to ask some of the twentieth century's most extraordinary freedom fighters about humanity's path to a prosperous and peaceful future. However, as thirty of the thirty-nine living peace laureates arrived for three days of discussion about "The Conflicts of the Twentieth Century and the Solutions for the Twenty-First

Century," the realities of a world far from peace closed in. Rooftop snipers stood alert in key locations surrounding the converted ski chalet, site of the conference events. F-16 fighter jets crouched in their hangars on high alert. Throughout the city, armed police and canine patrols paced the streets in case Osama Bin Laden's threats became terrifying reality. The precariousness of world peace and the fragility of life, in particular the lives of these great world figures, hung in the crisp northern air.

Against this backdrop, the questions that *WIE*'s Daniel Piatek posed to the laureates seemed even more pressingly relevant: *What will it take for humanity to evolve beyond the division, conflict, and injustice that so afflict our world? Is spiritual evolution*

what is actually needed for us to truly transform human life on this fragile planet? Clearly these men and women, who have fought with their lives to change human history, have thought deeply about our shared future. And each of these rare individuals demonstrated in their very being a passion for life, a strength of character, and a depth of conviction in our ability to effect change that gives great faith in the potential for human evolution.

We are honored to be able to bring to you the reflections of seven Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, some of the twentieth century's most heroic individuals, on the role of spirituality in humanity's next evolutionary step.

What will it take for humanity to evolve beyond the Is spiritual evolution what is actually needed for us

Archbishop
Desmond
Tutu



Rigoberta
Menchu Tum

Guatemalan exile
and international
advocate of indigenous
peoples' rights



Lech
Walesa

Leader of the Polish
Workers' Solidarity
Movement



I HOPE THAT WE CAN begin to realize that all of us are created in the image of God, that all of us are God-carriers. The evolution that people are speaking about is the recognition of our essential goodness. And that we are made, surprisingly, for transcendence, for beauty, for joy, for caring. So many of us are unaware of our heritage. Some of the bewildering things that happen drive us, as it were, back to our source, to our roots. When we realize that we are vulnerable, that we are not omnipotent, then maybe we will see where our true security lies.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his work to end apartheid in South Africa. Persevering through decades of fierce opposition, Tutu successfully campaigned for equal rights, common education, the abolition of unfair passport laws, and the end of forced deportation of blacks. Through his courageous political stand and his deep spiritual faith, Tutu was able to break down the religious racial barriers and become the first black leader of the national South African Council of Churches.

OUR RELIGION, our way of living, and our closeness to nature are very important. Our ancestral culture is very profound and has deep values that allow us to have hope for the future, and support us to look toward a better world in the future. We have so much to learn about how to live and how to behave for the sake of the future. Our religion gives us the strength and will to do this. Many of us don't have power. The power is in other hands. But yes, there has to be a bigger way of seeing, where we don't just think about ourselves, where we think about the whole. It's very important that we all work for peace and for human rights. We have to take care to defend the truth. And the Nobel laureates have a very important role, which is to say, "There is a problem. We know the truth, and we have a vision for the future."

Rigoberta Menchu Tum received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

Born to a poor Mayan family, Menchu Tum began working for social reform through the Catholic Church while still a teenager. In 1981 she was forced to flee her native Guatemala after her family was brutally tortured and then killed for their resistance to the military regime. While in exile, Menchu Tum published a powerful firsthand account of the crisis in Guatemala, exposing millions to the tragic abuse of human rights in Central America. At great risk to her own life, she has continued to campaign for social justice, democracy, and ethnic rights for indigenous peoples throughout the Western Hemisphere.

IT'S EASY TO SAY that we should rise up and evolve, but how do we do it? We have to remember that what we are facing now is still the era of division. We're divided on too many things, and we are using religion to be divided also. Now we should fight this division, and then develop a new view on religion. We need to find out that there is just one God, and then there are many different teachers. But first we should stop the conflict. We should stop the divisions. And we should make sure that there is no more injustice. If we stop what we are doing right now, we will not create new problems. To find out what's possible for humanity, we need to sit down and talk together. We need to speak about everything—what we own, how we are, how we live. It has to start with individuals, and then we'll meet together as one.

Lech Walesa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983.

An electrician from Gdansk, Lech Walesa headed the Polish Workers' Solidarity Movement, the organization credited with bringing down the legendary "Iron Curtain" and ending the long era of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. Relying on his own deep Catholic faith, and with unprecedented support from the Pope, Walesa took a bold stand against Soviet martial law and helped lead the Polish people to democratic self-rule with the slogan, "For our freedom, and for yours."

division, conflict, and injustice that so afflict our world? to truly transform human life on this fragile planet?

H.H. the
Dalai Lama



I USUALLY SPEAK of two levels of spirituality. One kind of spirituality has to do with faith. The other is not necessarily religious faith; it simply has to do with having good human qualities, such as a sense of caring for one another, a sense of community, and a sense of responsibility. We can have a happy world without a religious government, but a happy world is not possible without good human qualities. So, within that context, spiritual traditions have an important role, which is to increase or extend basic human values and make a contribution for a better, more compassionate world. Education, not necessarily a religious state, will help humanity do this.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. *The Dalai Lama, spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetans, led his people into exile in 1959 when the Chinese government violently invaded their native land. Over the past four decades, his unwavering commitment to nonviolent resistance and his call for compassion, in the face of the deaths of over one million Tibetans and the systematic destruction of the Tibetan religion, culture, and natural environment has earned him the respect, honor, and love of millions around the world.*

Jody
Williams

Founding coordinator
of the International
Campaign to
Ban Landmines



I'M NOT SURE I would posit that the change we need is spiritual. When I look at classic Western Judeo-Christian spirituality, the atrocities that have been carried out in the name of God are repulsive. But I do think that an important component in changing our world involves an ethic of living from the fact that we are not fundamentally separate from others. Because, obviously, if we don't divide the world into "them and us" or "you're my enemy and I'm the good guy," it changes how conflict would be resolved because it's not "them against us," it's "we against us." It's our problem in one way or another—so how do we deal with it to the betterment of all? Religious leaders are effective, and I think the first step is through religious leaders like the ones sitting here who combine their spirituality with active politics and don't just sit in monasteries, which doesn't really rapidly bring about world change.

Jody Williams and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997.

Williams founded the ICBL in 1992 to raise public awareness of the inhumanity of landmine weapons and to campaign to end their use around the world. Within half a decade, what had seemed like an unrealistic utopian movement successfully brought about the signing of an international treaty banning antipersonnel landmines. ICBL is now officially supported in over sixty countries by over one thousand non-governmental organizations.

Oscar Arias
Sanchez

Former President
of Costa Rica



YES, WE NEED TO CHANGE our perspective and we need to change our values, but I don't think it will only come from spirituality. We cannot remain so hypocritical, so cynical, and so selfish. These values need to be replaced by solidarity, compassion, justice, and generosity. It is already a fact that the population of the developing world will be seven times larger than that of the industrialized nations in forty years' time, so we cannot go on not addressing the basic issues on humanitarian fronts. It is the responsibility of each one of us—in the family, in the church, in the classrooms, in the university, in government, in civil society—to make this change in values happen. My dream—and this is not a utopia—is to have a more egalitarian society in the world, with fewer social differences. This is not going to happen if we don't change our ethics. Only if we change our ethics will we change our priorities; and only if we change our priorities will we change our actions.

Oscar Arias Sanchez was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987.

Known as a man of the people, Sanchez has worked tirelessly for the last three decades to bring humanitarian concerns to the forefront of national and international political agendas in Central America. The architect of a watershed peace agreement among five Central American nations, Sanchez has brought about a climate of cooperation and respect for civil and human rights in an area that has long been factionalized by border tensions, governmental oppression, and civil war.

continued on p. 176



The Great Bombay Tea Shop Debacle

WIE announces the winners of the "Did Chris Parish get enlightened in the tea shop?" contest

IT ALL STARTED out innocently enough. It seemed like just another interview. But when Issue 14 of *What Is Enlightenment?* hit the stands in the Fall of 1998 with an article entitled, "Close Encounters of the Advaita Kind: The Euphoric Nihilism of Ramesh Balsekar," reality took an unexpected left turn. And we soon found ourselves in the middle of a surprise controversy. . . But before I go any further, let me give a little background.

Ramesh Balsekar is an Indian spiritual teacher living in Bombay who is quite popular with Western seekers. He teaches his own unique version of the Hindu philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, offering a spiritual enlightenment based on a completely deterministic vision of human life. For the above-mentioned issue, our reporter Chris Parish traveled to Bombay and interviewed Balsekar at length, curious to understand the intriguing notion of a

teaching of freedom that eradicates all free will from human affairs. In an epilogue to the interview, Chris wrote the following lines:

As I stumbled past the doorman and out into the bustling Bombay streets, my mind was reeling. How could it be, I asked myself as I made my way through the crowd, that an intelligent, educated man like Ramesh Balsekar could really believe that everything is

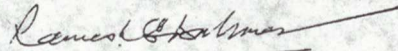
November 21, 2001

Amy Edelstein,
Editor.

My Dear Amy,

Many Thanks for your letter of Nov 9, 2001 and for the copy of your magazine on the occasion of your tenth anniversary.
When I finished reading the epilogue to the interview by Chris Parish, I was very impressed by the spontaneity, the sincerity and the courage, I saw in the writing. How deep the impact, or whether it was erased by a resurgence of the original resistance, depended, of course, entirely on Chris Parish's destiny, or, the same thing, the Will of God according to a conceptual Cosmic law.

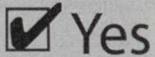
With warm regards and love,
Yours sincerely,



Ramesh S. Balsekar

Did Chris become enlightened?

What a few of our readers think:



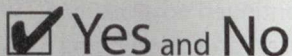
Chris obviously became enlightened.

- Ha, ha, ha, ha. . . Chris is already enlightened. His interview with Ramesh Balsekar was just the shock he needed to realize what already is.
- While reading Chris Parish's dialogue with the Master, and especially the epilogue, I felt such a relief and joy as if a heavy burden was removed from my life. I was filled with warmth and I felt free of shame and guilt.
- There is no "he" that became anything! At the right time and place, the grace of the Guru touched the mind/body known as Chris and the personal "me" (ego) became the impersonal "isness."



Chris certainly did not.

- Chris? There is no Chris to become enlightened. To say "Chris" became enlightened brings with it the delusion of personal doership.
- Chris's view lacks the all-embracing view of reality which would prove that he was operating from a simultaneous consciousness of all levels of reality, physical, psychic, emotional, astral. . . .
- I don't like the idea of judging whether someone is enlightened or not. If Chris is, I'm happy for him. If he thinks he is enlightened, who am I to say he's not. You keep at it, Chris! You are the only one that matters in terms of whether or not you were enlightened. It's your road alone. You must interpret what it means to you.



- Chris must now find and practice his vocation/calling/dharma to deepen his capacity to remain established in this state, or ego will reassert itself.
- If Chris thinks he is not enlightened, then he is a fool. If he thinks that he is enlightened, then he is a bigger fool. Just ask any frog. Plop!

predestined, that before we are even born, our fate is already etched in a kind of ethereal granite? Could he really be serious in his insistence that our entire life, with its seemingly endless stream of choices and decisions, of precarious opportunities to set our own course for better or for worse, is actually, from the first breath, a *fait accompli*? . . . For Jesus or Ramakrishna or Ramanama Maharshi to say he was surrendered to God's will was one thing. But to say that this is true of everyone seemed at that moment to reflect a peculiar and even dangerous form of madness—and one which could be used to justify the most extreme forms of behavior. Balsekar's statement, "What you think you should do in any situation . . . is precisely what God wants you to think you should do" means that to him the enlightened Buddha is no more doing the will of God than the serial killer who is attacking his next victim. . . .

Suddenly the welcome sight of a tea shop appeared through the smog, and as I made my way inside, I was relieved to find the kind of quiet oasis for which I had hoped. It was there, at one of the many empty tables, as the first sip of sickly sweet milk tea passed across my lips that, in a flash, it hit me. I was not drinking the tea! I was not sitting at the table! In fact, I was not the one who had entered the tea shop. . . . In fact, it had never been me doing anything. It was as if a burden I had been carrying for my entire life was suddenly lifted into the sky by a hot-air balloon, whisked away, never to return again. All those years I had struggled to be a better, more honest and generous human being—all that effort I

had made to renounce my tendencies toward superiority, selfishness, and aggression—had all been a folly, all foolishly, needlessly based on the self-important idea that I had some control over my own destiny, and the petty presumption that what I did to "others" ever mattered anyway. How could I have been so misguided? But wait, it wasn't even me who was misguided! As if through parting clouds, clearly now I could suddenly see that what I had thought of as "my life" had in fact been only a mechanical process. The person I had thought I was was just a machine. And the world in which I thought I had been living was not, as I had assumed, a world of human complexity, but one of mechanistic simplicity, of perfect order, a mathematical playing out of programs in motion since the beginning of time.

As the clinical perfection of God's scientific plan started to open up before me, the ecstatic thrill of absolute freedom—from worry, from care, from obligation, from guilt—began to rush through my veins like a torrent of undammed rivers. And with it came an enveloping, resounding peace, an absolute cessation of tension, in the recognition that no matter what apparent ambiguity or uncertainty I might encounter thereafter, no matter what seemingly difficult decisions I might face, I could always rest assured that whatever choice I made was exactly the choice God wanted me to make. The mysterious sense of an Unknown that had tugged at me for so long had evaporated. The others in the café turned their heads as I laughed out loud, a long belly laugh, and mused to myself what a fantastical game life would be if

everyone understood how it all really works, if everyone could at least get a glimpse of how free we could be, if we all lived on Planet Advaita.

While there has been tremendous confusion among our readers about the meaning and purpose of these words, one thing is clear. Our intention in writing them was simple—or so it seemed at the time. The tea shop story was, in a word, satire. Indeed, at the time we were concerned that the piece might be perceived as being too critical, which just shows how completely unprepared we were for what actually happened. As the issue hit the stands and the mail poured in over the weeks and months, it was clear that we had succeeded in making Parish's "awakening" in the Bombay tea shop sound plausible. In fact, we had succeeded beyond our wildest expectations. Many of our readers understood the epilogue to be not a provocative look at the startling implications of Balsekar's "euphoric nihilism," but rather a profound and inspiring description of deep spiritual realization. Several wrote thanking us for the generous endorsement of Balsekar's ideas, and some even expressed their profound gratitude to us for helping to relieve them of the long-held burdens of their own conscience. And then a letter from the Master himself arrived, stating that he was "delighted" with the article and that it was "accurate" to his teachings. Though Parish tried to tip off our readers in the next issue of WIE explaining that while "Planet Advaita is a nice place to visit," he "definitely wouldn't want to live there," it failed to stem the growing controversy. Letters continued to pour in, arguing, debating, and defending various sides of the issue. One writer even contacted us asking for permission to reprint the piece

in his forthcoming book as an unusually clear description of the moral impact of profound spiritual awakening.

Caught off guard by the reaction to the article, we realized that we had done more than fail to make our point. We had somehow managed, in the minds of many, to confer legitimacy to the very ideas we were playfully trying to raise questions about. It was time, we decided, to clear the air, and soon

the "Did Chris Parish get enlightened in the tea shop?" contest was born.

So for this issue of WIE we are pleased to announce the winners of the contest initiated in our Tenth Anniversary Edition six months ago, concluding a story whose twists and turns always seemed to be a few steps ahead of anything we could have predicted. We would also like to express our thanks for everyone's responses—especially the unexpected entry postmarked from

Bombay that came straight from the desk of Ramesh Balsekar himself. And while it may not have been God's will that Mr. Balsekar win this particular contest, we do appreciate his good-spirited participation. Whatever Chris Parish experienced in the tea shop that morning in Bombay four years ago, we're pretty sure he won't be burning up the *satsang* circuit anytime soon. Unless, of course, God has other plans. ■

— Carter Phipps

WIE contest winners!

We received four correct responses with equally compelling arguments. So, our Grand Prize Winner was chosen by random drawing from these four:

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

Congratulations to *Gila Hanck-Mahlberg*, who wins a ten-year subscription to *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine. Here is Gila's response:

- No: Actually for me the whole epilogue story was just really good fiction. At least the last sentence, "how free we all could be, if we all lived on Planet Advaita," was the important hint for all Sherlock Holmeses among the readers that proved the story to be a fake.

RUNNERS-UP

The three remaining contestants who answered correctly will each receive a WIE T-shirt. They are:

Graham Giles

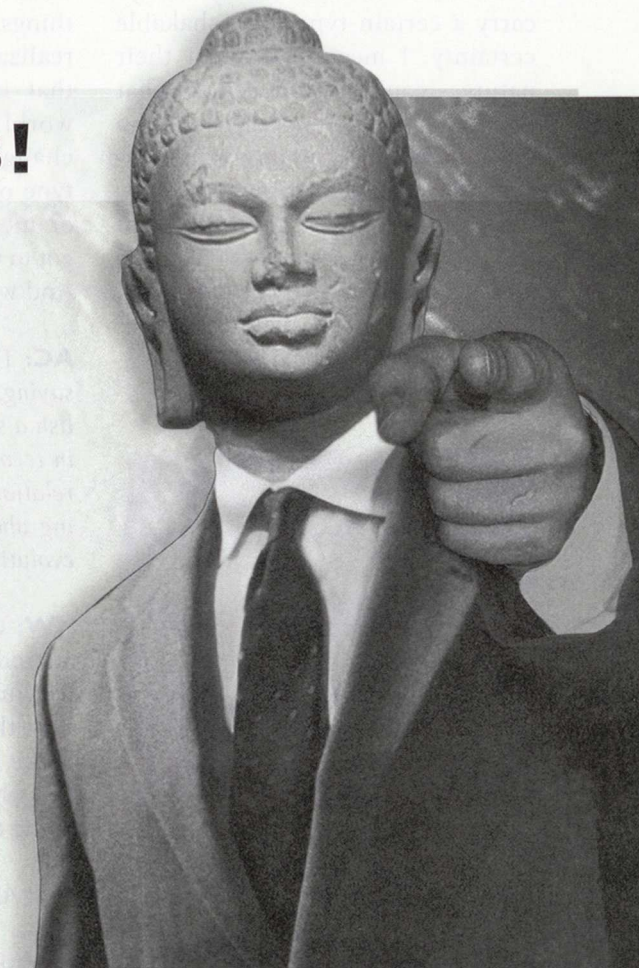
- No: The main reason I think people took Chris' *tea* spoof spiritual experience in a Bombay ~~coffee~~ shop seriously instead of recognizing it as being fictional is because they wouldn't doubt the veracity of what you told them about Chris; it was also very well and convincingly written.

Stephen Gugliucci

- No: Given Mr. Parish's Buddhist/atheist and Karma-altering mind bent, I feel that the epilogue is purely tongue-in-cheek satire at its best.

Charles Morel

- No: Instead of enlightenment, Chris obviously felt he had been in a *Twilight Zone* episode with his Rod Serling-like opening remarks. But he shouldn't feel bad for two reasons. According to Ramesh Balsekar: 1. There is no "he" to feel bad. 2. It was God's will that he wasn't enlightened.



HONORABLE MENTION

Each will receive a WIE T-shirt.

For best satire, (or was it?):

- Pinkeltje [Viespeuk] Aarsklont, whose inventive fictional response entitled, "The Zebra Crossing or How the Wonderful Mr. Parish Got Invited to the Game" continued our story, but left us wondering if this reader had really figured it out!

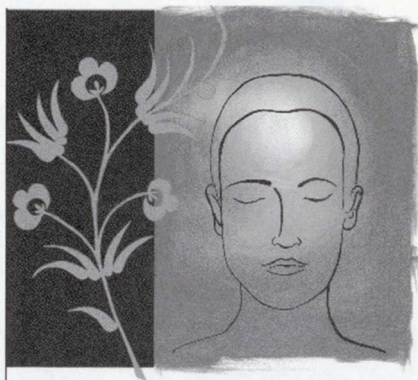
For most heartfelt response:

- Enid Shulman, for sharing her own experience of meeting Ramesh Balsekar.

occasion—the modern and the post-modern form of incarnational nonduality. And because there are so few precedents, discriminating wisdom is harder to come by.

AC: Yes, I know, because it's all so new.

KW: That's right. It's all new, and therefore you can't exactly draw on old compass points. So nobody can really be sure that they're absolutely right, although a part of these nondual states is that they always carry a certain type of unshakable certainty. I mean that's just their nature—you're introduced to what is, and what is, is. Period. There's no questioning that. But its actual manifestation gets very dicey. It's really hard to tease apart the aspects of this that are truly certain and the aspects of this where I'm just being lazy, misinformed, egoic, fearful, idiotic, those kinds of things.



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AC: Isn't that always true when one's on the edge? Or pushing the edge, shall we say?

KW: It is. But the difference is that if you're in a tradition where the pioneers figured this out and then handed on the tradition, like in Zen Buddhism, for example, you've got tradition and lineage to fall back on. They have looked at pretty much all the pitfalls of that particular realization, and in that sense, I think traditions and lineages are very good things. But every time new types of realization come into being—and that means, again, whenever the world of form has so evolved and changed that you need a different type of evolutionary enlightenment or incarnational nonduality you've got to rewrite the instruction manual. And we all f— that up!

AC: The thing is, that as you've been saying, the traditions can and do establish a standard, but, at the same time, in terms of evolution itself, at least in relationship to what we've been speaking about, they can actually prevent evolution from occurring.

KW: Oh, absolutely. I mean that's an old story. And whatever form we come up with today, we will prevent the new emergence later. We'll make the same mistake ourselves. But that need not stop us from being critical now.

AC: Absolutely.

KW: I can give you a very specific example in the field that I work in a lot, which is the effort to integrate some of the discoveries of Western psychology with some of the traditions that have a really sterling understanding of emptiness and nonduality within their own world of form. The Vajrayana, for example, is a wonderfully

complete system—for feudal Tibet. That's not to say that the levels they describe aren't here. They are still here. Their realization of emptiness is probably unsurpassed. But the world of form has changed. And either you get on that train—the spirit's evolutionary train—or you become that which prevents evolution. And that's one of the real difficulties.

At that point, as you say, the tradition, which helped stabilize an important understanding, becomes that which prevents a new unfolding. And that's very dicey, of course, because then you have to be really careful about what you're doing here. So many of the problems faced by contemplative orders in this country—and I mean Buddhist and I mean Christian and I mean Vedantan—could be helped enormously by a simple infusion, in the world of form, of the understandings from developmental psychology. But they don't want to do it because it seems to imply their tradition is not complete, their tradition isn't a whole path, there's something wrong with their tradition, and so on. And we're really not saying there's anything wrong with their realization; we're just saying that we can help with the vehicle, with the world of form, by telling them things that we have discovered in the world of form that weren't known a thousand years ago. And if they're not going to incorporate that into their own understanding, then their nondual realization will be inadequate because they're not living up to the world of form.

AC: It seems now that so much is changing so fast in the world, a lot of the traditions are going to have a lot of trouble. The world of form we are living in is changing so quickly and so radically. With new forms of communication, the world is becoming so

much smaller, and I wonder if the traditions are going to be able to keep up with the evolving needs of spiritually hungry people without holding them back in many ways. But there are very few people who really want to push the edge of human potential anyway, so maybe it's ultimately not that important.

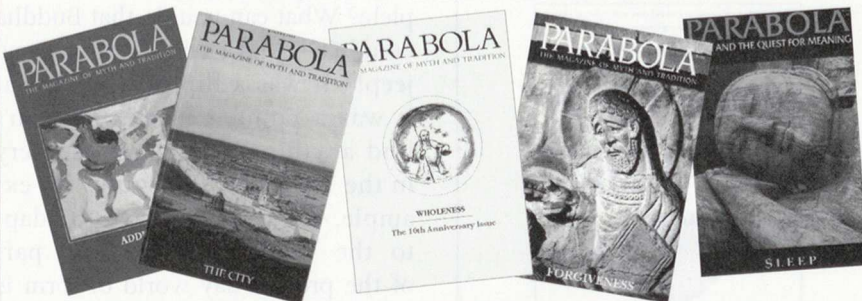
KW: Well, it is a disturbing question to those six people doing so, Andrew! Again, part of this very delicate balancing act is that the traditions have a fund of absolutely invaluable, incredibly precious knowledge and tools for transformation. And, again, I myself am not saying that any of those are wrong. I'm just saying that there are other tools today that need to be added to that. And when you do that, you do get a different picture. And the picture is not only, "Here are some tools for transformation that can help your other tools," but it also gives you an even fuller type of incarnational nonduality, which, in a sense—and I think this is what you were saying—jettisons the lingering perfume of escapism, or mere transcendentalism, or get-off-the-wheel-ism that does tend to pervade some of the traditions.

AC: It seems that when one has made a serious emotional investment in a particular spiritual path, one's faith that that path can lead one to perfect liberation is usually based on the conviction that the path itself is perfect and completely whole. And when it dawns on one that maybe one's chosen path or tradition doesn't in fact have all the answers to every question, especially for this evolving world that we're living in, it can be a disturbing moment of reckoning for the practitioner.

KW: One time I did an interview with a major Buddhist magazine, and the interviewer had looked at A Brief

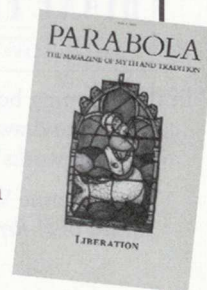
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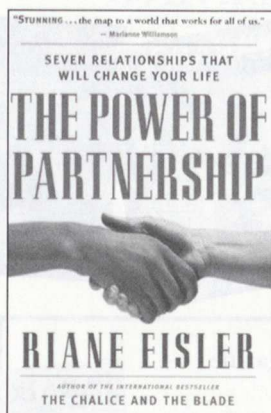
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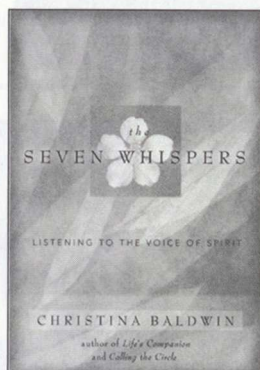
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History of Everything. He saw the four quadrants, and he saw that Buddha was in the upper left quadrant and not the other ones. So I was in trouble already. He asked me, "Well, are you saying that Buddhism isn't complete? What can you do that Buddha couldn't?" And I said, "I can drive a jeep!" It was a flippant point, but it was a point. I mean, you can't find anything about heart surgery in the Tantras or the Sutras, for example. So we really have to adapt to the world of form, and part of the present-day world of form is that we live in an evolutionary universe. That's part of our own self-knowledge. And we have all this extraordinary information and research gained from Western psychology. Even if we're living in the world of samsara, we understand the world of samsara much better than somebody who's meditating in a cave. So why not combine both of these?

AC: In terms of spiritual development and evolution, I've noticed, and I think it's been proven to be true, that for most human beings our natural tendency is toward homeostasis. In other words, it seems to be the human tendency to want to resist change, to want to create the illusion of security in an insecure universe, and, above all, to avoid at all costs having to face into the awesome and unlimited nature of life itself. But the fact is that in this world we're living in, in this evolving universe, everything is changing all the time. And so in order to be able to respond to this ever-changing world in a way that expresses the freedom of enlightened consciousness in time, in order to be truly at one with the evolving universe, so to speak, one would definitely have to free oneself from the natural inclination toward homeostasis. What that represents for most of us is the ego's blind attachment to false security in this insecure world.

Now, in the enlightened state, as I understand it, one is resting in the unborn, unmanifest ground of being. And if one is truly free, if one is truly abiding there and never moving from that ground, then in the world of time and form, in the most ideal case, one would be free from the ego's attachment to that which is false, and the expression of that liberation should be that one was liberated from a static relationship to time. In other words, one might have certain routines, like drinking coffee every day or always preferring rice to noodles, but one's fundamental relationship to time and the changing world would ideally be a consistent expression of dynamic freedom and creativity in the world. So again, to be free in an evolving universe, one would definitely need to free oneself from this natural inclination toward homeostasis.

KW: Well, I think that's right. And I think, again, what you're talking about is the paradox of incarnational nonduality—because it is a paradox. And that's what's so astonishing. On the one hand, there is a realization that you literally are the infinite unborn in every single moment of existence—twenty-four hours a day, in every realm of the universe. That's unshakable, unmoving, unmistakable, undeniable. And you are this embodied individual, one slice of manifestation looking out on the rest of manifestation. Both of those are true. And in the world of form, which is indeed unfolding, evolving, constantly in dynamic process, how your individuality then bumps up against the rest of your manifestation becomes very interesting. Because that's where this great mysterious process occurs, where on the one hand, you are radically liberated in all moments, and on the other hand, you have a duty, an obligation

to push against those parts of the world that don't share your freedom and fullness.

So, as you've been saying, there's almost a kind of divine obsession with tinkering with your own manifestation. That's the paradox. And holding both of those in mind is difficult for anybody who has a type of nondual realization. It's very much as if you create this extraordinarily beautiful model and then you get a hammer and start bashing it because you don't like parts of it. We manifest this extraordinary universe and then we bitch about parts of it and try to fix it. But that's the game. That's the extraordinary paradox of this thing. And I do think that one of the first things you do have to do is get that individual vehicle aligned with the rest of the process of manifestation, and that means a dynamic constant changing. And to the extent that you hold back from that, or you recoil from that, you're not standing in the Self, capital S. You're standing in the ego, afraid of this and afraid of that.

AC: Exactly. Precisely. Truly standing in the Self would be a human life where one was fully embracing the life-process, ultimately, completely.

KW: Certainly on a good day!

AC: Indeed. Being a teacher, it's interesting for me to consistently observe, in my students, that the natural inclination of most individuals, and even more so of a collective, is homeostasis. I mean, it's one thing to get an individual to let go of that which is inhibiting their ability to begin to embrace life with the kind of totality that you were just speaking about. But it's another thing altogether, and infinitely more complex, to get a collective to do the same thing. In fact, it's almost impossible, but I hope not completely.



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KW: One of the ways that I would slightly reframe what you're saying is that homeostasis is a strong drive in individuals, but there's also another drive that's equally strong, and that's Eros, or even Agape—the drive that takes you beyond yourself in one way or another. And what I hear you saying is that oftentimes, you get the expansive drive and then it's like, "Okay, I've done enough of that. Whoa! Time to contract. Get away from me!"

AC: Exactly. Time to rest in self-satisfaction.

KW: "Hey, I expanded two inches, get the f— away from me now."

AC: Right. "I've done it. I've done it." You know, it's hard for people to understand that the truth is that we will never have done it. It will never happen—not if we are really doing it!

KW: Well, the whole spiritual process, as you know, is designed to leave stretch marks all over the ego. That's rather the point. And it's about as pleasant as childbirth too.

AC: Well, I don't think people are interested in ego death these days.

KW: Why, good heavens, no! That would be marginalizing, cruel, nasty, not honoring the plurality of ultimates!

AC: Ken, there's an interesting situation I've become aware of in this emerging exploration of evolution and its relationship to enlightenment. On the one hand, there are a lot of people who are very fired up about evolution these days, and it's great because their passion for evolution is almost always expressed, in one way or another, as an inspired interest in the health and welfare of the evolving world. However, because their interest is not also

in the transcendent, in that mystery that abides beyond the world, they often don't seem to be very aware of what I would call the sacred. And then on the other hand, for many of the people in the nondual traditions who are passionate about transcendence, and for whom enlightening one's consciousness is of primary importance, the welfare of the evolving world rarely seems to be a significant matter.

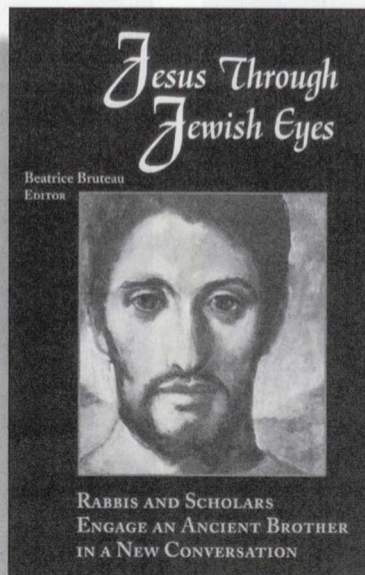
KW: Right. And this is another variation on the theme that we've been developing. Again, it's a simplistic notion, but there is *samsara*, there is *nirvana*, and there is their nonduality. And sometimes, ironically, people who have, shall we say, a keen, accurate understanding of *samsara*, and are nobly motivated within *samsara*, can do better for the world than those who are merely looking at *nirvana*, even though, in some sense, that might be a higher state. And it's very strange to see people who aren't in touch with the sacred doing really good work in the world, and to see people who profess to be in touch with the sacred basically ignoring, denouncing, or renouncing the world, and thereby increasing the suffering in the world.

AC: What a crazy world! You know, it's hard to know where we're all finally headed, but when some of the traditions do talk about the highest stages of human evolution, they often see it as involving some kind of absolute transcendence of and control over the physical form. Some call it the attainment of "the light body." The yogic, Tibetan, and Christian traditions all have variations on this concept. Do you believe that it's actually possible, as some believe, through spiritual practice, to attain what's called the "body of light," and through that attainment have such absolute control over the

physical realm that one would literally be able to control one's very cells?

KW: Well, I think, as is usually the case with these issues, that there's a grain or several grains of truth in it. And certain fantasies, wishes, hopes, fears, that inevitably get hung on these things. On the one hand, there are certain positive things that are behind the notion of a light body. And you sort of need a complicated esoteric psychology and ontology to go into it. The simplest way to approach it is to say that as the *dharmakaya*, or emptiness, infuses the *rupakaya*, or form, with ecstatic, blissful release, that form itself tends to take on a transparent or luminous quality. And this is another variation on the whole idea of nonduality—that basically things that were thought to be "spiritual" and in some other realm, "up there," can in fact be present in this concrete body, and transfigure it. There's a lot of truth to that in many ways, and I think we have to honor that truth. On the other hand, this notion is made-to-order for egoic fantasies of omnipotence. And yogic traditions are not immune to this. I mean part of yoga, indeed, was what you would call a "higher yoga," the realization of the transcendental self—just as in the martial arts, the highest levels were often infused with a Zen understanding of nonaction, spontaneity, and no-mindedness in the midst of fighting. But a large part of the yogic tradition, the lower part, so to speak, was basically egoic fear and control over natural processes. So the idea there is that if you are totally enlightened, you can totally control *samsara*. And that doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

AC: You know, when I used to teach in Bodhgaya, India, I met many Tibetans, and, almost without exception, they were convinced that if someone was



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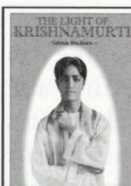
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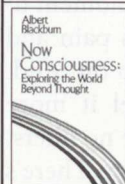
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fully enlightened, not only were they omnipotent and omniscient, but they were also incapable of suffering on any level, including the physical.

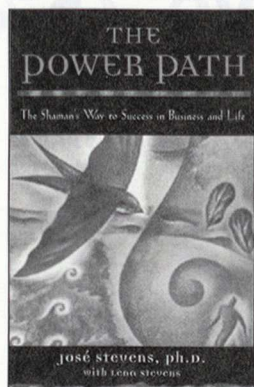
KW: There's a strange kind of mixture between the old ideals of the merely ascending path of *nirvikalpa* or *nirvana* and the tantric ideals of the nondual. The classic drive in both the Patanjali Sutras and the Theravadan tradition really is to get into that unmanifest cessation. And in that state you can feel no pain. There literally is no pain. Again, it's very similar to the state of deep, dreamless sleep that people are plunged into each night. There's no pain, there's no ego, there's no suffering, and so on. That's very similar to the nirvanic state. And if you can do that consciously, you can do just what some of the monks in Viet Nam

did—you can pour gasoline on yourself, set yourself on fire, and not blink once. That's *nirvikalpa*; it's not nondual. The unfortunate part about nondual realization is that you don't become less sensitive to suffering, but *more*. Because you cannot escape into *nirvikalpa*. You are ensconced as the witness under all conditions, and therefore you notice everything arising moment to moment. And that means pain and suffering and hurt, and so on. And, if anything, you can feel it more intensely because there are no filters. There's no egoic protection. There's no way to say, "Okay, time off. Where's the morphine?" So that part is paradoxical as well because the pain arises in a sea of ecstasy, but the pain doesn't go away. So the notion of full enlightenment meaning you can egoically boss your cells around doesn't quite work, I think!

AC: You know, in Sri Aurobindo's tradition of Integral Yoga, which definitely claims to integrate enlightenment and evolution in ways that few nondual paths had previously, they seem to be speaking quite a lot about that kind of thing. They are literally talking about the "enlightenment of the cells" as being the highest expression of spiritual evolution.

KW: I know that. The real "descent of the supermind" is supposed to be a transfiguration into a bodily being of light. Frankly, I think that's a preliminary vision of the stage of incarnational nonduality that is just emerging, and I think a hundred years from now, or a thousand years from now, it will have a completely different form. You know, we might be existing inside fiber optics, our

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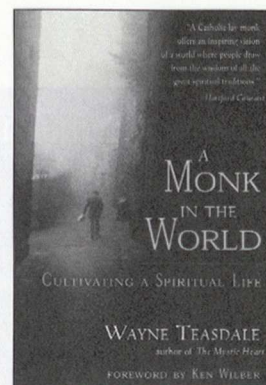
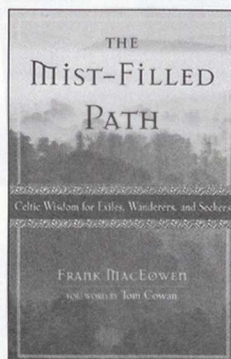
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entire consciousness luminous digital bits scattered through all eternity. We don't know what it's going to look like. I think that was just one enlightened vision of what a *rupakaya* transformed by and infused by *dharmakaya* would look like. But that's just one possibility, and I think we're going to have a much better understanding as the decades and centuries unfold. I'm not sure it's going to be exactly like Sri Aurobindo thought, but it might be. I'm just saying it's going to be interesting to see what actually unfolds in the world of form. ■

* In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, "Supermind" refers to a dynamic force and plane of consciousness superior to mind that perceives the Absolute Unity of all existence within the realm of diversity, and that unleashes a profound transformative potential when it descends into the manifest world.

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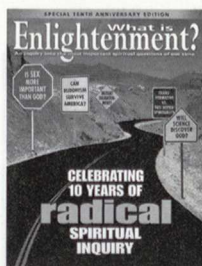
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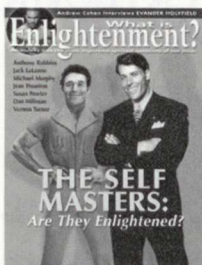
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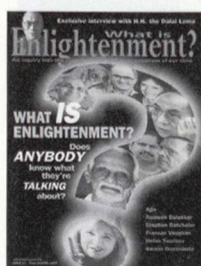
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Divine Source of all reality. And that, of course, is intended toward the future—it is future-oriented, and it is the intention that there should be more being because its own nature is the gift of being. It gives itself to every being. It is its pleasure to give itself, to expand and radiate. It is our participation in the “glory of God” that “fills the whole world.”

This is how we, as individuals, doing our spiritual practices, coming to our Self-realization, to our enlightenment, make possible the next step in human evolution, which is to say, cosmic evolution, which is God’s Self-manifestation. The hidden Godness in us comes forth and shows itself for what it is and rejoices in the truth of its Being.

WIE: *In your view of the next evolutionary step, you emphasize the importance of the collective or human community. Why is the nature and formation of this collective so significant?*

BB: Because the collective is an integrative operation. You see, the collective is the medium by which the oneness both is made out of the diversity and protects the diversity and transcends the particular diversity that composes it. This is a kind of leapfrog by which evolution always moves. So a molecule is a kind of community. A cell is a kind of community. Molecules are communities of atoms, cells are communities of molecules, and so on. Now, we’re following this same pattern that evolution seems to have followed, which is *unite in order to create*. The new human community will be some kind of an entity, some kind of a Being. Just as the organism is a collective of molecules and the molecule is a collective of atoms. So if you can get human beings to share

their characteristic human energy—which is agape, knowledge, concern, creativity, inventiveness, and all the other kinds of strictly human energies that we have—all that interchange of energies binds us together into a community. And when the whole community experiences and practices this kind of love, the crisscrossing energies form a net, and the net is the New Being that can do what the individuals that it is composed of could not do.

WIE: *In your writings, you elaborate on the role of integration and differentiation—two central elements of both scientific and spiritual evolutionary theory. We’ve spoken quite a lot about the process of integration, but could you say more about the role and value of differentiation in the creation of this new order, or what you just called the “New Being”?*

BB: Yes. Diversity is absolutely essential to the unity of the composed being. The more diversity, the better. It means the greater the variety of the relations and interactions among the composing entities, the more intricate the composed unity. Think of a painting with fifty different shades of color rather than one made with only three. Or think of an orchestra with fifty different instruments instead of a single instrument—the different players interact with one another, increasing the being of the whole, the richness, the beauty. Each time cosmic evolution makes another Great Step, the diversity within the New Being and the diversity of the interactions of the new whole with its new peers is vastly increased. It’s like adding another dimension; how much more there is to a volume of space compared with just a surface!

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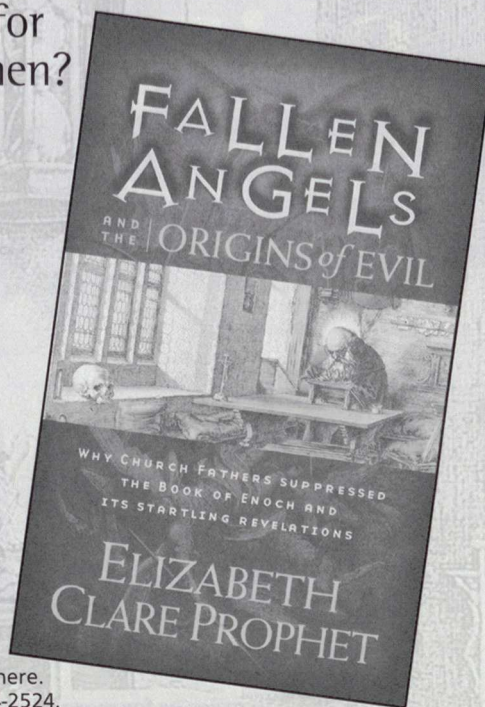
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BB: If we really think that that's the final goal and there's nothing beyond it, then it might be.

WIE: A lot of spiritual teachers do think that way. We often hear it said that when you wake up, you realize that this world is only an illusion and therefore nothing of this world matters!

BB: Oh yes, I know. But if you really wake up, you should discover from the experience itself that it is not the end. In fact, I believe it was the Indian philosopher and sage Sri Aurobindo who said that Shankara told only half the story. Traditional Vedanta says that this world is really Brahman, or the Absolute, but it appears as Maya, or illusion. Now where Aurobindo felt that Shankara had stopped short was that Shankara did not pursue this and say, "Well, what Brahman is doing is manifesting as world. And that means that the world is holy and the world needs to be encouraged to manifest further." What we're looking at is the creative activity of the Brahman. There is the Absolute, and the Absolute manifests itself in terms of the relative. Both the relative and the Absolute are real. Both the Infinite and the finite are real. You are a miniature of the same structure. The deep Self in you is the Absolute, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Divine, and it's manifesting as the particular human being that you're embodied as, at the present time. So I would say there are two poles. There is a mystical pole, which is what Shankara invites us to, and then there is the creative pole, which is this whole evolutionary movement.

WIE: So would you say that a view that recognized only the validity of "Being" and not of "Becoming" would be an incomplete view?

Complex Nondualism

WIE: Many Eastern traditions describe the pinnacle of human potential as the realization of nonduality. Is the union you are speaking about analogous to this definition of enlightenment?

BB: Yes, but it's a nondualism that doesn't reduce to a monism. That is to say, our personal energies do not merge or become submerged in some amorphous whole. We do not acquire a kind of oceanic sense of being swallowed up in a great All. Quite the contrary: subjectively, it feels rather like an intensification of individuality—Self-consciousness or Self-realization. Perhaps we might call it "complex nondualism."

WIE: Do you think that some philosophies of nondualism might be antithetical to an evolutionary

perspective? For example, the traditional Eastern definition of enlightenment is final cessation, or the end of all becoming. What is the relationship between enlightenment, as it's traditionally conceived, and your view of spiritual awakening as the foundation for an evolutionary progression toward ever-higher expressions of integration?

BB: The answer to that brings together two things I've been speaking about. When you find the I AM in the center of your self, that's the cessation part. And having found it, you discover that its intention is toward becoming, and that's the evolution part.

WIE: So could the traditional definition of enlightenment as the end of becoming actually be an obstacle to the realization of our evolutionary potential?

BB: I would say that a nondualism that eventually rejects or escapes the whole domain of manifestation deprives the process of its own intrinsic value. Complex nondualism urges that we do not need to reject the manifest phase in order to perfect the unmanifest phase. Rather, the desired position is to rest in the Unmanifest and express in the Manifest, not alternately but simultaneously and by mutual implication. The Unmanifest, being of the nature of agape, necessarily radiates Being, thus expressing as Manifest. And the Manifest, realizing its deep nature as the expression of the Unmanifest, experiences itself as That. Our evolution in consciousness is aimed at this complex Self-realization and enlightenment. Our spiritual practices are to bring us to that realization.

What Is Going On

WIE: *Do you see a final culmination, or as Teilhard would have put it, an Omega point, at the end of the evolutionary trajectory?*

BB: I tend to go along with the idea of an expanding universe; I don't have an Omega. I don't think there's a final end point; I think it's a song that goes on singing. We don't sing the song in order to come to the end of it. The divine Self-expression isn't trying to complete itself. We impose that idea because we generally do things with some kind of a defined goal, but here we're doing something with the Infinite, and so it doesn't have a limited or defined goal for itself. It's trying to express the Infinite in the various media of finitude. I would say that life attains its goal—it becomes what it is supposed to be, fulfills itself—precisely by never coming to an end. If it ever did come to an end in

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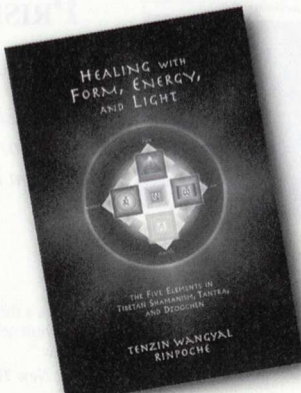
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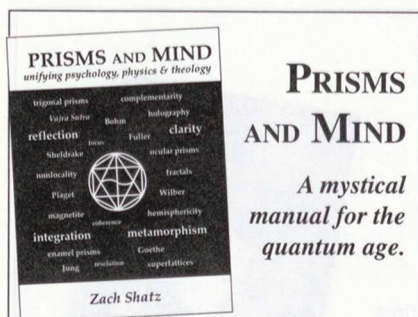


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which there was no more novelty, there would be no more life; it would be dead.

So you see, it is very important that we participate in this because this is What Is Going On. This is reality. We respond to it initially on the individual level because that is where we are presently experiencing ourselves. And we *all* must do it because we all exist, and no one can be left out. Everyone is absolutely essential and infinitely precious. Since the process of forming the next Great Step in evolution, which is the manifestation of the Infinite One, requires that we ourselves voluntarily, consciously, and intentionally *do* the interactions that will constitute the energy exchanges that *make* the New Being, we each and all have the honor and the responsibility for living and creating the expression of God as world.

Every little thing counts because everything is real and is part of the picture. Nothing escapes; nothing is on the side. Everything is making its difference to the whole. No one is ever outside the God-process. But it goes only where we go with it. It doesn't force us; we are the movers from the inside. So it won't go forward unless we move it forward. That is why we are all so important. We cannot wait for the world to turn, for the times to change that we may change with them, for the revolution to come and carry us round in its new course. No more will the evolutionary forces of nature propel us in their groping way through the next critical point into a new state of Being. From now on, if we are to have any future, we *must create that future ourselves*. We ourselves are the future and we are the revolution. ■



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this universe one particle of matter
or one foot-pound of force, nor can
one particle of matter or one foot-
pound of force be taken out. If that
be the case, what is this intelligence?
If it was not present in the proto-
plasm, it must have come all of a
sudden, something coming out of
nothing, which is absurd. It, there-
fore, follows absolutely that the
perfect man, the free man, the
God-man, who has gone beyond
the laws of nature and transcended
everything, who has no more to
go through this process of evolu-
tion, through birth and death, that
man called the "Christ-man" by the
Christians, and the "Buddha-man"
by the Buddhists, and the "Free" by
the Yogis—that perfect man who
is at one end of the chain of
evolution—was involved in the cell
of the protoplasm, which is at the
other end of the same chain.

Applying the same reason to the
whole of the universe, we see that
intelligence must be the Lord of cre-
ation, the cause. What is the most
evolved notion that man has of this
universe? It is intelligence, the ad-
justment of part to part, the display
of intelligence, of which the ancient
design theory was an attempt at ex-
pression. The beginning was, there-
fore, intelligence. At the beginning
that intelligence becomes involved,
and in the end that intelligence gets
evolved. The sum total of the intelli-
gence displayed in the universe
must, therefore, be the involved
universal intelligence unfolding it-
self. This universal intelligence is
what we call God. Call it by any
other name, it is absolutely certain
that in the beginning there is that
Infinite cosmic intelligence. This
cosmic intelligence gets involved,
and it manifests, evolves itself, until
it becomes the perfect man, the
"Christ-man," the "Buddha-man."
Then it goes back to its own source.
That is why all the scriptures say,

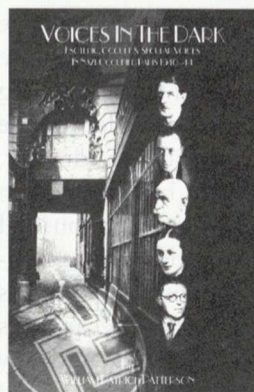
"In Him we live and move and have
our being." That is why all the
scriptures preach that we come
from God and go back to God. Do
not be frightened by theological
terms; if terms frighten you, you
are not fit to be philosophers.
This cosmic intelligence is what
the theologians call God.

I have been asked many times,
"Why do you use that old word,
God?" Because it is the best word for
our purpose; you cannot find a better
word than that, because all the
hopes, aspirations, and happiness of
humanity have been centered in that
word. It is impossible now to change
the word. Words like these were first
coined by great saints who realized
their import and understood their
meaning. But as they become cur-
rent in society, ignorant people take
these words, and the result is that
they lose their spirit and glory. The
word God has been used from time
immemorial, and the idea of this
cosmic intelligence, and all that is
great and holy, is associated with it.
Do you mean to say that because
some fool says it is not all right,
we should throw it away? Another
man may come and say, "Take my
word," and another again, "Take
my word." So there will be no end to
foolish words. Use the old word,
only use it in the true spirit, cleanse
it of superstition, and realize fully
what this great ancient word means.
If you understand the power of the
laws of association, you will know
that these words are associated with
innumerable majestic and powerful
ideas; they have been used and wor-
shipped by millions of human souls
and associated by them with all that
is highest and best, all that is ratio-
nal, all that is lovable, and all that is
great and grand in human nature.
And they come as suggestions of
these associations and cannot be
given up. If I tried to express all
these by only telling you that God

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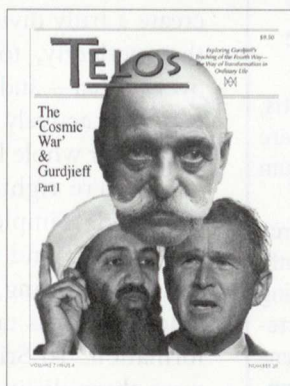
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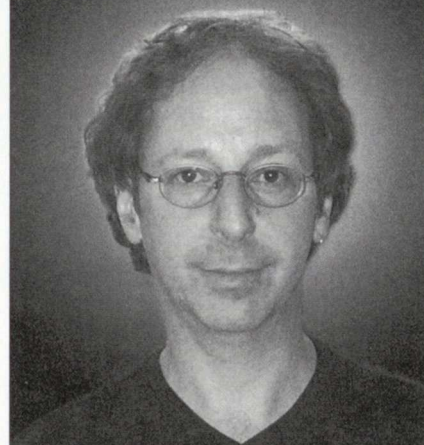
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created the universe, it would have conveyed no meaning to you. Yet, after all this struggle, we have come back to Him, the Ancient and Supreme One.

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uttered, He is the man who is talking. He is the audience that is here. He is the platform on which I stand, He is the light that enables me to see your faces. It is all He. He Himself is both the material and the efficient cause of this universe, and He it is that gets involved in the minute cell, and evolves at the other end and becomes God again. He it is that comes down and becomes the lowest atom, and slowly unfolding His nature, rejoins Himself. This is the mystery of the universe. "Thou art the man, Thou art the woman, Thou art the strong man walking in the pride of youth, Thou art the old man tottering on crutches, Thou art in everything. Thou art everything, O Lord." This is the only solution of the Cosmos that satisfies the human intellect. In one word, we are born of Him, we live in Him, and unto Him we return. ■

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“You’re right—it is powerful,” Amy said. “Simple, but profound.”

“Yeah. And where this gets really interesting,” I continued, “is where he starts talking about transformation. To Sri Aurobindo, there were three distinct transformations that had to happen: the psychic, the spiritual, and the supramental. I don’t get the supramental transformation yet, so I’m not even going to try to explain it. And the spiritual transformation is, I think, what most of us probably have in mind when we speak about enlightenment or Self-realization. It’s the realization of the Infinite, the Absolute Self, or Ground of Being. But there’s something unique about what he calls the psychic transformation, particularly in relationship to evolution. For Sri Aurobindo, this was the key to the whole path.

“Apparently, when he first started teaching, and for several years after that, he used to teach people in the way he had been taught, by trying to get them to have the experience of the silent mind, presumably hoping that this would lead to the same kind of breakthrough into *nirvana* and beyond that happened to him. But in the mid-1920s, based on his findings after working with people for several years, he shifted his emphasis radically. In that shift, he started to emphasize, as the first and foremost priority, the discovery of what he called the ‘psychic being’ or ‘soul.’ Now the word ‘soul,’ particularly these days, is used to refer

to all kinds of different things. But Sri Aurobindo meant something very specific. He was basically saying that there is an individual spark or seed of the Divine in each of us, what could be called our true self or, as he sometimes said, ‘true being.’ And although this true being is usually obscured or veiled by the outer personality and ego identity, its promptings can be felt even in that veiled state as our own spiritual impulses or aspirations. What’s significant about this psychic being is that, according to him, because its nature is the Divine itself, not only does it want us to evolve toward perfection, but it knows the way to get there perfectly. This is why he put so much emphasis on it. Because once the soul, or psychic being, comes forward or emerges in the individual, there is a natural dynamic aspiration that overrides all of the resistances of the ego and lower nature. It’s like the ego gets kicked out of the driver’s seat and God takes over the wheel, *as you*. And once that happens, the path changes completely. Then one is aspiring and evolving ever upward. It’s clear which choices will take one in that direction, and all the passion and interest is there to make the right choices. So from there, he felt the rest of the path could unfold organically and without much difficulty. In my interview with Amal, he couldn’t stop talking about this. I could tell that for him this had been what had changed everything. He said it’s like a shift into a completely different dimension. And when I asked him what his ongoing experience is now, he just said there is ‘a warmth and a glow in the heart center,’ and you could feel it coming out of him.”

After a brief silence, Carter spoke up. “It’s a serious teaching and Amal sounds like quite a guy. It

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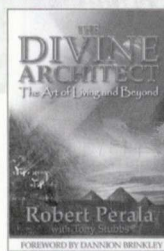
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seems like Sri Aurobindo had a big effect on people."

"It sure does," Andrew agreed. "Well, from the sound of things, you're already in deep. Why don't you see if you can get a sense of the 'supramental,' and let's talk again tomorrow night."

The Supermind

My mission for the next day was clear. Although I had managed to get a handle on much of Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary vision, and at least the rudiments of Integral Yoga, somehow what the supramental was all about had continued to elude me. In the many conversations I had had so far, I had heard numerous references to a "new consciousness" that those who live in the ashram feel to be an animating presence in their collective spiritual life. And

while I had some sense that this was somehow related to what Sri Aurobindo had referred to as "the supramental consciousness," I couldn't quite be sure. And then there was this enigmatic event called the "supramental descent" or, at times, the "supramental manifestation" that seemed to occupy such a central place in the community's history. I had to find out what it was and, more importantly, why it mattered.

Throughout the day, in conversations first with my hosts, Richard Pearson and Kailash Jhaveri, and then later with a rising star on the Indian lecture circuit, Sraddhalu Ranade, I would have the chance to explore all of my questions. And by the end of the day, I had a much clearer sense of why, in the Integral Yoga community, the supramental is spoken of with such reverence.

To Sri Aurobindo and to the Mother, I would learn, it was this extremely high and powerful level of consciousness that held the key to humanity's collective evolutionary potential. By the time my evening phone call came, I was eager to tell my colleagues what I had learned. But Carter had other plans.

Before I could get a word in edgewise, he launched straight in, "Hey, I think *The X-Files* just found some serious competition. Have you read Georges Van Vrekhem's book *Beyond the Human Species?*!"

"Part of it." I wondered where this was leading.

"Did you happen to read this part about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother fighting World War II with their psychic powers?" he continued. "Van Vrekhem says, without the slightest equivocation, that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had a

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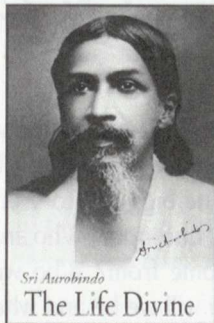
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huge influence on the outcome of the war by putting their spiritual force on the side of the Allies."

"I must have missed that part. Actually, I spent more time reading Peter Heehs's biography. He never mentions anything like that."

Carter was enjoying this. "For example, it says here that Sri Aurobindo used to psychically influence Churchill's thinking. He was actually the one behind those inspiring speeches. And he influenced the military strategy, too."

"You've got to be kidding," Andrew said with a touch of exasperation. "Did Sri Aurobindo really say that?"

"Well, not exactly. It sounds like Van Vrekhem is inferring quite a bit," Carter reassured us. "But you haven't heard the half of it. According to him, Hitler's every move was being guided by a demon that used

to appear to him in his room. Well, one night the Mother temporarily subdued this demon on the occult planes and then appeared to Hitler disguised as the demon and instructed him to attack Russia, a critical mistake that, as we all know, weakened the Western front and ultimately cost him the war."

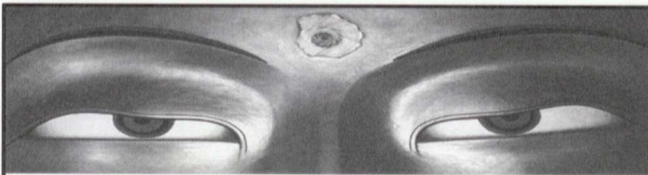
"Hey, I once read something in a book about how that decision was made," Amy added. "I can't remember the details, but it sounded like something really spooky happened that night—like Hitler was really out of his mind."

"That's an understatement," Andrew remarked.

"Well, what I want to know," Elizabeth broke in, "is how this all fits in with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's extraordinary evolutionary vision, or for that matter, with Integral Yoga. Controlling people's

thoughts and vanquishing demons? I mean, maybe it's just me, but I'm finding it a little hard to put this all together."

"I actually think it's pretty simple," Carter announced. "Look, the Mother was interested in the occult from day one, so it's no big shock that she was still into these things at the ashram. I mean a lot of spiritual people are fascinated by the paranormal. Look how many of your spiritual friends went to see *The Sixth Sense* or *Phenomenon*. And as for Sri Aurobindo, well, he was Indian. He was into yoga. Isn't that just part of the whole yoga tradition? The idea that we can develop these supernormal powers or *siddhis*? I don't know if they're true or not, but these kinds of stories are rampant around Indian gurus. I mean, have you ever read *Autobiography of a Yogi*?"



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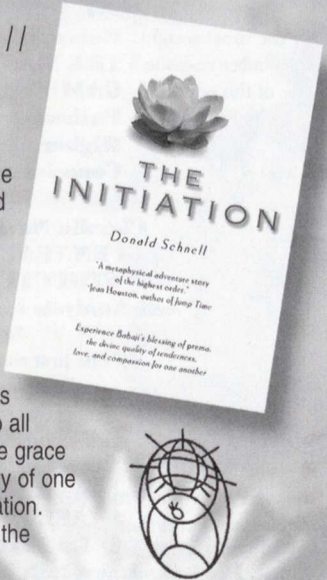
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"I agree," I jumped in. "Anyway, if you did have powers, I can't imagine what better cause they could be used for than saving the world from Hitler."

"Oh, and one more thing," Carter went on. "It also says in here that the war was actually started by evil forces attempting to block the 'supramental manifestation' that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were trying to bring about through their yoga."

"That's it," said Andrew. "No more X-Files for you guys."

"Wait a minute. Let me get this straight." Elizabeth paused. "Do you mean to tell me that the rise of Hitler was a sort of satanic response to what they were doing down there in a little ashram in southern India?"

"I'm only telling you what the book says," Carter replied.

"All I can say is I guess it's

a good thing they stopped the war then, since apparently they were the ones responsible for it in the first place," Andrew concluded, laughing.

Amy tried to get us back on track. "Didn't you say something about a supramental manifestation?"

"Yeah, Craig, did you ever manage to find out what the supramental was all about?" Carter asked. "Van Vrekhem talks about the supramental manifestation quite a bit in his book, and to be honest I can see why you were a little lost on that one."

"I thought you'd never ask," I replied. "I've been speaking to people about it all day, and I think I'm finally starting to get it. It's powerful stuff."

"Great. Enlighten us." Andrew sounded relieved to be changing topics.

"Okay. Well it might seem a little complex because I feel like I'm only starting to get a handle on it, but basically the first thing you have to understand is that for Sri Aurobindo, and for the Mother, this Supermind was really *everything*. I mean, the supramental manifestation was *the* main event of everything they were trying to make happen. It was this, they felt, that would really open the door for the divine life on earth to come into being."

"This being what exactly?" Carter asked. "What was it that they were trying to do?"

"Okay, well, first you have to understand the Supermind itself. Then we'll get to the 'manifestation.' Remember Sri Aurobindo's experience back in the jail cell? Well, apparently what I read to you was just the beginning of a whole

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series of experiences that occurred over the course of the year he spent there. During that time, he began to explore what he called the higher realms or planes of consciousness that exist above the mind. He said that there was a series of what he called 'overhead planes,' progressing from Higher Mind to Illumined Mind to Intuitive Mind to Overmind. And at the top of all these planes or levels of consciousness was a level he called 'the Supermind' or 'the supramental consciousness.' Now, the thing is, and I think this is the intriguing part, this Supermind was not the same thing as the infinite, empty, static, Absolute undifferentiated pure consciousness that most mysticism points to as the highest level. It was one step down from that. Or rather, it was a sort of link plane, or bridge, between that

Absolute consciousness and the whole realm of manifestation and diversification below it."

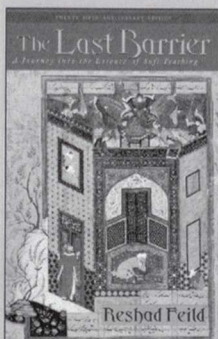
"Did you say a 'link plane'?" asked Elizabeth. "I mean, conceptually I can *kind of* get it, but do you have any idea what that really means?"

"Well, I don't know if I get exactly what 'link plane' means either, and I don't know whether Sri Aurobindo actually ever used that term himself," I continued. "What was important about this idea of a link or bridge, though, was that in some very significant sense, this level of consciousness brought together what was above it and what was below it. In other words, the Supermind is that which, while being fully conscious of the undivided, unmanifest Ground of Being, also perceives the fullness and richness and multiplicity of

the manifest reality without there being any contradiction between the two. It sees the Ultimate Unity of all *in* diversity itself. It has a vision of perfect wholeness, and in that, it unifies everything.

"The reason this is so interesting, particularly in terms of evolution, is that in addition to speaking about the Supermind as that which sees the unity within diversity, Sri Aurobindo also spoke about it as a Conscious Power. So, you see, this was not a sort of passive divine state of being. It was an immense, conscious, unifying power, which contained an unimaginable transformative potential. And that, I think, was the big key because he really felt that this power, if it could be 'brought down' into the physical world, could transform life as we know it. That's what the 'supramental manifestation' was all about.

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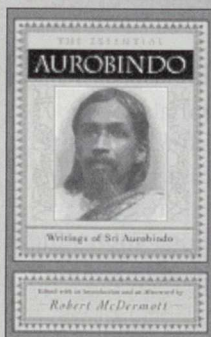
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He and the Mother worked to bring that down."

"And 'bring it down' means?" Carter asked.

"Well, that's the question nobody seems to be able to answer. What I do know is that in 1926, after he had a big yogic breakthrough that he called 'the descent of the Overmind'—which apparently is one plane below the Supermind—he withdrew into seclusion for the rest of his life, so that he could dedicate himself completely to bringing this highest power down into 'the earth consciousness.' The important thing to understand here is that he wasn't just trying to do it for himself. He said that if he had just been trying to bring it down into himself, it would have been easy. No, whatever he was doing in that room of his for all those years was something he felt would have

transformative implications for the entire race, the entire world. It's hard to know for sure exactly how he thought it would happen, but one way or another, it was going to change the consciousness, and even the very substance, of everyone on the planet."

"Was this what the focus on the body was all about?" Andrew asked. "And the idea of immortality?"

"That definitely seems to have been part of it. I mean he really thought this supramental consciousness would change *everything*, right down to the cellular level, even down to the very structure of matter itself. We're talking no limitation on every level imaginable."

"Wow," Carter said. "Talk about transformation. No wonder he was calling this the emergence of the superman."

"So, what happened in the end?" Elizabeth persisted. "Did he do it? Did Sri Aurobindo bring down the supramental?"

"Nope."

"No?" Amy sounded disappointed. "How anticlimactic can you get? Thanks for the big buildup, Craig."

"Wait, I wasn't finished. *He* didn't do it. But according to everyone here, the Mother did."

"The Mother?!" they said as one voice.

"Yes. But with his help. According to her, he could have kept living, but he died on purpose so that he could go and work from the other side, leaving her behind to work from here, and the two of them together, six years later, made the big event happen."

"So, what happened?" Carter asked.

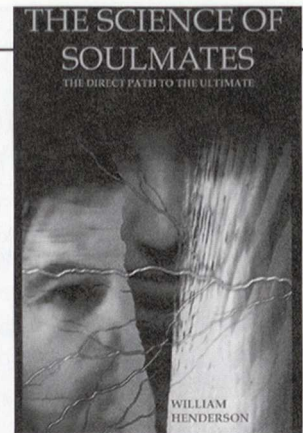
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“Sorry, I don’t actually know. I wish I had pursued it a little more, but I think I was so excited to finally be comprehending this thing that I missed a few obvious points. But I still have one more interview. It’s with Peter Heehs, the historian who wrote that great biography of Sri Aurobindo. I’m sure he’ll be able to give me the whole story.”

Manifesting the Supermind

The next morning, in preparation for my interview with Heehs, I ventured down to the ashram library to see what I could find out about this portentous event in which, I was told, the Mother had “manifested the Supermind in ‘the earth’s atmosphere.’” There, amidst the archives, I learned that after Sri Aurobindo’s death in 1950, the Mother had begun an

intensive immersion in her own yogic efforts, an immersion so deep that at one point she even warned people not to touch her because the force coming through her was so powerful (a claim that was reportedly proven when one disciple accidentally touched her finger, only to be knocked unconscious by the strength of the force). It was in the midst of this intensive yogic effort that on February 29, 1956, the unprecedented and long-awaited “Golden Day” finally arrived. As the story goes, it was a typical Wednesday evening, and all of the disciples had gathered at the ashram playground for the Mother’s weekly talk and meditation. But as she later wrote in a message to her disciples, what happened that fateful night was much more than a meditation:

This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that ‘the time has come,’ and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.

As it’s reported, the Mother’s experience that night was overwhelming. So much so that, as Peter

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Heehs would tell me, at the end of the meditation “she looked up, and she thought everyone would be knocked flat on the sand of the playground.” But to her amazement, Heehs explained, “They were all just sitting there like nothing had happened. And as far as they were concerned, nothing had.” But in spite of the lack of an immediate impact, the Mother remained rooted in her conviction that the great breakthrough had in fact occurred. Two months later, in the ashram journal, the following message appeared:

*Lord, Thou hast willed and
I execute:*

*A new light breaks upon
the earth,*

A new world is born.

*The things that were promised
are fulfilled.*

The “things that were promised” in

this case meant nothing less than the introduction of a new evolutionary dynamic into “the earth consciousness”—one that, as Sri Aurobindo put it, “could not fail to exercise an immense influence on mankind as a whole,” and which, given enough time, would ultimately bring about a wholesale transformation of life on earth.

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother expected this evolutionary breakthrough to unleash sweeping global changes. I wanted to know from Heehs, from his perspective as a historian, how did he think it was going? Had history borne out the predictions? As he summed it up: “I hate to say it, but it’s forty-five years later and, at least visibly, things haven’t changed much for the better. Of course, we’re talking about a cosmic development so you don’t necessarily expect everybody

to be golden the next day, but . . .”

As I made the rounds of the ashram that afternoon, saying my farewells and thank-yous to the many extraordinary people I had met during my week there, I asked everyone I encountered: What did they think about the supramental manifestation? Had it really happened? And if so, what had been the effects? And over those last few hours in Pondicherry, a very different picture began to emerge. A picture that, with a little imagination, even started to look something like the faint beginnings of the new world Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had envisioned so long ago. It was clear that almost everyone thought the supramental manifestation had definitely happened. In fact, in their eyes, its unifying effects could be seen *everywhere*. From the trend toward globalization to the increasing

interest in mysticism in the West, from the growing concern for the environment to the fall of the Berlin Wall, from the international coalition against terrorism to the emergence of the Internet, from the end of apartheid to the increase in women's rights, from the New Age to the new physics, everywhere we look, they feel, there are unprecedented movements toward unity that would not have been possible before. And all of it, in the minds of the most dedicated believers, can ultimately be traced back to what happened on this one otherwise quiet night in the ashram playground.

The Call to Evolve

"So, what's the final report from the laboratory?" Andrew asked, at the beginning of our first editorial meeting following my arrival back in the States.

"Well, it's a lot to take in," I answered. "In only four days, I feel like I hardly scratched the surface. But even after just a brief visit, I definitely feel like I've got a flavor of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were about. There's a dynamism in the people there, a kind of awakened interest in life, in others, that's unusual around a spiritual group, particularly in India. I mean, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were both so dynamic themselves, and you really feel that same kind of evolutionary current in the air there. It's a powerful place."

"But, you know, in terms of my original point about Sri Aurobindo—I have to tell you, after everything I've learned, I am more convinced than ever that both he and the Mother really were *incredibly cool*."

Carter laughed. "Oh come on, enough of that already."

"I'm serious. Check this out: At a certain point, Sri Aurobindo

wrote something about the importance of cultivating a strong and healthy body as part of preparing for a truly integral transformation. Well, guess what the Mother did in response. She built a gym for weight lifting, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, tennis courts, a running track and soccer field with stadium, a basketball court, and an aerobics studio."

"An aerobics studio?" Elizabeth raised an eyebrow.

"Just testing you," I laughed. "But the rest is all true. She had the whole ashram school on a compulsory, seven-days-a-week athletic regimen that included martial arts and boxing—even for the girls."

"Boxing in an ashram? Nice try." Elizabeth wasn't going to fall for that again.

"I'm serious about that part. And all this was back in the fifties. In India! And do you know what else I learned? Apparently, way back at the start of World War II Sri Aurobindo actually donated money to the British to help them fight the war. Now, remember, he had been their number one enemy over there not so many years before, and at that point, India's independence was still unresolved. I mean, talk about having a global vision—he was seriously walking his talk. As to the whole question of whether he also helped *fight* the war with his spiritual power, well, I mean, I did hear this one amazing story. There was an American field sergeant in the trenches in World War II whose platoon was about to get surrounded by the Nazis, when suddenly this sort of ethereal figure appeared to him in the air and gave him explicit instructions as to how to get his troops to safety, which worked. And then, after the war, the sergeant was in India and happened to visit Pondicherry, and realized it had been Sri Aurobindo who had

appeared to him! I mean I don't know whether I believe it or not, but . . . what's that Shakespeare quote: 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in . . .'"

"Well, there is no doubt that he is, as you said, completely outrageously cool," Andrew agreed. "He's done so many remarkable things that I keep having to remind myself that we're talking about a real person. But you know, more than anything, what I find so extraordinary about him was his willingness to stand alone in this evolutionary vision at a time when he was really the only one who saw it this way. It's as if once this fire for manifesting the divine life caught hold of him, that was it, and he never backed down. The world needs more people who are willing to fight that kind of fight for the highest possible reasons. And look how much he opened up for all of us as a result."

Carter nodded. "It is extraordinary. I'm amazed at how much he illuminated, and how much it still resonates half a century later. By the way, Craig, wasn't that one of your missions for this trip, to show our readers why Sri Aurobindo is not only cool, but relevant to enlightenment in the twenty-first century?"

"It definitely was. And, to be honest, at this point, I'm so fired up about his teachings that I think I could write a book about it."

"How about giving us the short version?" Carter smiled.

"Well, what I think Sri Aurobindo has to say to humanity today, which I think will be relevant until the day the entire world has indeed become divine down to the quarks, is that evolution needs our participation. In a way, this is the most inspiring and empowering part of his vision: That through the choices we make every day, we

can help to move evolution forward toward this glorious, divine end he spoke of. It's as if he was saying, in some sense, that the direction is already set, but the power to bring it about lies entirely in our hands. And that's the good news. We *can* bring it about. In fact, given the state the world is in, we *have to*. There's so much that's possible. So for any of us who still think enlightenment is about waiting for the big blast that will get us out of here, he's saying, 'Wake up and join the revolution. The revolution of consciousness. The revolution of evolution.' Because there's something to bring into being here that the world hasn't seen yet. And that, to me, is where Sri Aurobindo is going to be relevant for a long time to come." ■

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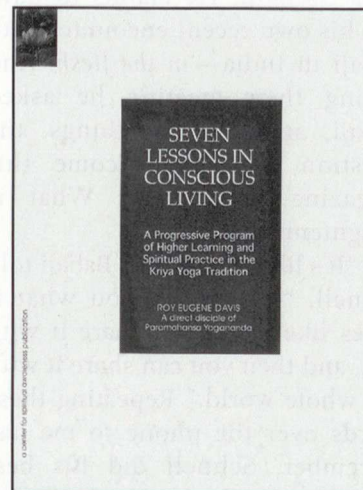
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of Dr. Donald Schnell's recent book *The Initiation*. Dr. Schnell is an American spiritual teacher who now goes by the name of Prema Baba Swamiji. He claims to have had his own recent encounter with Babaji in India—in the flesh. And during their meeting he asked Babaji, among other things, the question that has become this magazine's trademark: What is enlightenment?

"It's like chocolate," Babaji told Schnell. "I can't tell you what it tastes like, but I can share it with you, and then you can share it with the whole world." Repeating these words over the phone to me last December, Schnell did his best Babaji impression, complete with an Indian accent, and he conveyed a tone that might most accurately be described as playful. Indeed, Schnell's book is much lighter fare than many of its counterparts, and his portrayal of Babaji more colorful.

"We have all these images of Babaji where he is kind of locked in lotus posture. But he's the opposite of that from my experience. He's like a kid at a rave."

"A kid at a rave?"

"He's youthful, he's dynamic, he's energetic, he's in motion, happy.

He's more plantlike than human."

"Plantlike?"

"First of all, he's got like these perfect Hawaiian teeth. And what I mean by 'plantlike' is that there are plant stalks that are full and verdant, filled with water, and they don't look as if they have any bumps in them, because they don't. And Babaji's limbs—his arms and his legs—were like plant stalks. And there was a quality from him, from his *ahimsa* [nonviolence], which was more like plant than animal. When you go to a nursery and you're just surrounded by plants and you stop, connect, and breathe, there's a certain vibration—as opposed to when you're with animals. So, around Babaji, there's more of a plant vibration."

Dr. Schnell, by his own account, has had an unusual life. Spiritually passionate from a young age, he had always felt deeply connected to Babaji, and *Autobiography of a Yogi* was the first spiritual book he read at the age of eight. A student of the famous yogi Swami Muktananda and later closely involved with several other Indian teachers, Schnell writes that in 1997 he was summoned telepathically to India where he underwent a series of initiations with Babaji that are easily on a par with the most miraculous elements of Yogananda's

autobiography. And Schnell stood by the veracity of his story even when I pressed him on it, claiming that Babaji asked him to bring to the West an updated version of Kriya yoga, or what he calls *Prema* yoga. While there are many aspects to Schnell's *Prema* yoga—he lists the four main principles as *Prema* [love], *Shanti* [peace], *Ahimsa* [nonviolence] and *Mukti* [liberation]—fasting and proper diet also seem to play a key role, perhaps due to the influence of his wife, Marilyn Diamond, author of the well-known nutrition book, *Fit for Life*. And the goal of their yoga, as best I could tell, is a spiritual and physical evolution to an eventual state of such purity of body and soul that, like Babaji, we would no longer have to rely on food to sustain ourselves; our cells would be self-sustaining. As Schnell described the process:

"You give up meats and move into the vegetarian lifestyle, and maybe eventually beyond that you might even consider a raw food or live food diet, and then you move into breatharianism. As you move through that spectrum, your foods are getting purer and purer, creating less and less debris in the body, and your cells are becoming less toxic or more purified."

I suspected that this state of purity was somehow connected to the

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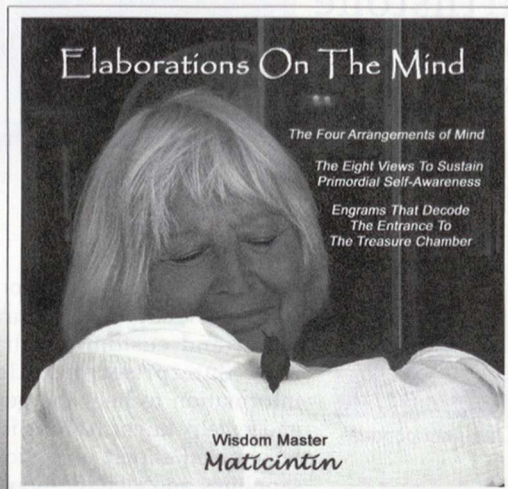
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plantlike appearance of Babaji that Schnell had described.

According to Schnell, who says he is still closely in touch with Babaji at a psychic level, the great Master also has a lot to say about our post-September 11 world, much of which will be included in a forthcoming book. Asked for a hint about the new material, Schnell was tight-lipped about details, alluding only to important political commentary by Babaji on the current state of world affairs.

The Baba of Haidakhan

Thus far I had only found one person who claimed to have seen Babaji in the flesh. But then I heard that thousands had flocked to India in the late seventies and early eighties to visit a Himalayan teacher known as Haidakhan Baba, believed by some to be the true Babaji. While

he bears no physical resemblance to the Babaji of Yogananda fame, he did, in 1970, suddenly appear in a local temple in Haidakhan, India, the same region that had, almost a hundred years before, played host to an appearance of yet another yogi whom many felt was the true Babaji. The mysterious tales of this early-twentieth-century ascetic had developed into a local legend, and he became commonly known in the area as Haidakhan Baba. So when a new yogi appeared in the temple dedicated to this long-remembered sage, many were quick to declare him to be the return of Haidakhan Baba, or Babaji. Possessing a powerful energetic presence and the ability to read minds, this new Haidakhan Baba's fame grew quickly. It was helped along by an influential student he attracted from the West named Leonard Orr.

While he has pursued many

paths in his years as a New Age pioneer, Orr is best known by far as the founder and guiding force behind the international rebirthing movement. Orr invented rebirthing over two and a half decades ago, and since then this powerful therapeutic breathing technique has spread quickly, attracting the interest of thousands, if not millions, of people around the world. In 1978 Orr met Haidakhan Baba in India and immediately recognized the yogi to be a modern manifestation of the immortal Babaji. When he announced to the world that the legendary avatar from the pages of *Autobiography of a Yogi* was now living in a body in Northern India, the effect was instantaneous, and a great many soon headed for Asia to receive *darshan* at the Master's feet.

Curious to know more about Haidakhan Baba as seen through

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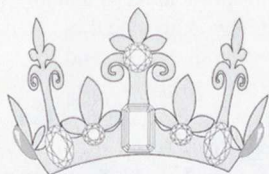
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Kriyaban meditators, Al and Dawn helped found a spiritual community in 1972, where they still reside today. The Kings are also founding members of the American Council of Vedic Astrology.

the eyes of one of his best-known disciples, I spoke with Leonard Orr last January and asked him, "Who is Babaji?"

"Babaji is the eternal father in human form, who, in the Eastern traditions, is known as Shiva yogi, the eternal youth. You have to realize that Babaji can have as many bodies as he wants. He has several bodies on the planet now.

"Babaji walks through the pages of all the great scriptures. In the Koran he's known as Khidir. In the Bible, he's known as the Angel of the Lord. He's the one who walked in the garden with Adam and Eve and who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and who trained Enoch and Elijah. One of Babaji's bodies is also Krishna. And as Krishna he said that if he didn't constantly work in creation, humanity would destroy itself.

"So he is not an absentee landlord, he constantly participates in human history. He plays in several different bodies in order to participate in a way that does a minimum amount of violation to the principle of freedom of choice. But he does work behind the scenes of history constantly in order to bring about the spiritual evolution and maturity of his children."

So what made Orr certain that Haidakhan Baba was actually the same Babaji about whom Yogananda had written in *Autobiography of a Yogi*?

"I talked with Babaji personally about Lahiri Mahasaya and Yogananda. The first time I went to see him, he told me that Yogananda had reincarnated, that he was about twelve years old at that time, and that I would meet him in Africa. I

didn't go to Africa until twenty years later, and in fact I did meet Yogananda there, but he wasn't a he, he was a she. And she lives in Johannesburg, South Africa. She is a member of the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra. She was actually born in Australia, and was taken to South Africa as a child."

"Was she aware of her former life?"

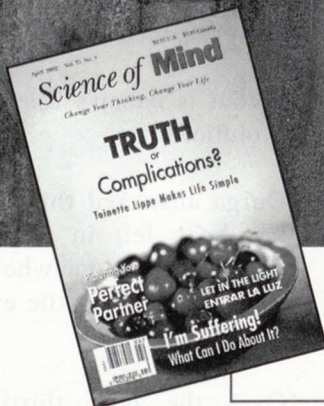
"She was — on an unconscious level."

During the course of the conversation, Orr made it clear that while human beings may never attain the same state of consciousness as Babaji, physical immortality is still our true destiny and the goal of human evolution.

"If you read the Shiva Purana, that has always been the ideal—for human beings to become immortal

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— Ernest Holmes



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yogis. Until enlightenment includes the physical body, it is very superficial. Yoga was the original religion and it has always been the ultimate path. But we can never become like Babaji. For example, I met a devotee of Babaji who is two thousand years old. When I came away from that meeting and was meditating on it, I realized that the difference between him and Babaji was infinite.

"When Babaji creates a body, he is *descending* into physical existence, and when immortal yogis evolve into Godlike beings, then they are *ascending*. So there is a big difference between a manifestation of Babaji himself and a human being. Even the great seers who are millions of years old are still learning God-realization."

I wondered how Orr viewed Babaji as he is represented by other

traditions and lineages—in particular, the immortal yogi that Marshall Govindan and Yogi Ramaiah write about.

"Babaji in that tradition is actually Sunanda, who is the son of Shiva and was created out of light. And that particular body is alive in the upper regions of the Himalayas near Badrinath. But I wouldn't call him Babaji's body any more than we would say that your body or my body is Babaji's body. Because he's a son of Babaji. He was created by Babaji at a particular point in history and he is a great immortal being who has only been on the planet, I guess, for nine hundred to a thousand years."

Whatever the true story of Haidakhan Baba and his fourteen years of teaching, his impact on people all over the world was quite profound,

as I found out in my brief foray into the story of his life. But it also seems that he failed to convince anyone but his own students of his connection to Yogananda's Babaji. Most of the individuals to whom I spoke in the yoga world, regardless of what they thought of his teachings, dismissed his claim to the throne.

Haidakhan Baba passed away in 1984, although his physical death did little to affect the faith of devotees, who simply saw it as a final teaching by a great immortal yogi on what it means to be a mortal human being.

The New Babaji

The latest information I had heard regarding Babaji was that a young man from Canada was declaring himself to be the reincarnation of the deathless avatar. "I'm now

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writing a book about the story," one of Leonard Orr's former associates told me, halfway into our conversation about the "new Babaji," as he is sometimes called. It all started when Orr moved to Walton, New York, in 1997 to spread the rebirthing creed to the residents of his former hometown. In this small upstate New York community, Orr's unconventional ideas didn't exactly find a receptive audience, and his announcement that Babaji, the ageless immortal, was now manifesting in the body of a twenty-year-old from Canada, who was giving teachings and *darshan* in the area, didn't improve Orr's standing among the locals. This new Babaji was working with a woman named Durga, who was reportedly the first to appreciate the great Master's new incarnation. In fact, over the couple of years that Orr lived in Walton, there were several "Babajis" who came through town, at least two of whom were encouraged to teach as incarnations of the immortal yogi by Durga, herself an alleged incarnation of the Indian goddess of the same name. Curious to track down one of these individuals, it only took me a few phone calls to be close to making contact.

"I probably know more about Babaji than anyone," the forty-something-year-old Durga told me as we spoke together one evening last January. "After all, he's my husband." She was not speaking in strictly legal terms, I soon realized, but referring to Hindu mythology in which Babaji is the Shiva avatar and Durga is Shiva's wife. And in fact Babaji, or the latest young man whom she recognizes to be an incarnation of the deathless sage, was sitting next to her on the other end of the line. Hesitant to speak to me directly, he asked Durga to function as our intermediary. "At what point did you

recognize your true identity?" I asked the young Babaji.

"In a certain way this body was prepared when I was born. When you plant a seed, it doesn't yet have petals like a flower. It takes time to grow. You only see it when it opens. But when I met Durga, the flower opened."

"What is Babaji's role in spiritual evolution?"

Durga answered this one: "Babaji has been left in control of the Earth. He's the one who's supposed to be monitoring the evolution of this planet."

Over the next thirty minutes, Durga and I continued our conversation with the distant voice of Babaji chiming in from the background. We spoke about the events at Walton, about how Babaji can manifest in up to seven bodies at one time, about the demonic forces that we must now battle during this dangerous moment in the history of the planet, about spiritual evolution, about Yogananda's legacy, and even about Sri Yukteswar's current reincarnation.

The next day I sat at my computer drafting this article. Deadline approaching, I wondered how best to bring my search to an end. Suddenly a chime sounded indicating that I had just received a new email. Absentmindedly, I clicked on the screen. From across the etheric fibers of cyberspace, another incarnation of the *Mahavatar* Babaji had agreed to an interview.

"Well, you have reached me," the email began. "I suppose in cases like this I must 'grant' an interview. How lordly that makes me sound. If my words can help people see their own divine nature, I would be happy to speak to you." And it was signed simply, "Yours, Babaji Mahadeva." ■

that it is *like something* to be alive. And that is the *one* thing that, it seems to me, science cannot explain.

WIE: What role do you see consciousness playing in human evolution?

RW: Well, that's the mystery. A common view among scientists, and one that is not entirely implausible, is that consciousness is a mere side effect. It's an epiphenomenon. In other words, it really plays no role. Like when you move your hand and it makes a shadow, all the action is in the hand, not in the shadow. The shadow's not doing anything. That's what an epiphenomenon is. It's at least an easy answer to visualize clearly. I know *exactly* what they mean when they say that. In a way, it's intuitively attractive to me precisely because it's a clear, comprehensible answer.

So let's take the example of love: what's being selected for by natural selection is altruistic behavior. And then as it happens, the neural processes that give rise to altruistic behavior *also* give you the feeling of love. But that's just a kind of lucky coincidence in this view. So what's always being selected for is behavior, or the neural mechanisms governing the behavior, but the subjective experience per se is not being selected for; it is just a by-product. That is the view of consciousness as an epiphenomenon. And as I said, it's in many ways an attractive view, but it does raise the question of what consciousness is doing here if it doesn't have a function. So the epiphenomenalist position is, in a way, the scientifically most attractive view, precisely because it is so clear and doesn't force you to rethink the nature of causality.

But it *does* pose that one very challenging question, "Well, then, why is consciousness here if it has no function?" Now, the alternative

to that, at least the main alternative as I see it, is to say that consciousness actually *does* play a causal role in the world. But then you are getting back to some kind of Cartesian dualism that is itself a challenge to the principles of science because science sees all the causality as residing in the material world. So one way or another, it seems to me, consciousness is this profound problem for science. Now, there are people who think they have a way around this, but I disagree. Yet, I have to add, consciousness is such a perplexing problem that I don't think anyone's view deserves to be dismissed out of hand. I don't know of anybody who seems to have the problem totally under control.

As I see it, there is really no way around consciousness being a fundamental mystery to science. If you take the Cartesian dualist approach, then it's a *real* problem for science at the most fundamental level, because it challenges the whole basic assumption of science that all causally significant things are happening in the material, publicly observable world. If you take the epiphenomenalist approach, it's reduced to not necessarily a fundamental problem, but a *really* perplexing question.

Suggestions of Purpose

WIE: Let's talk about purpose and evolution. You're very clear that evolution has direction. What are you saying about purpose?

RW: Well, I'm saying that the direction is at least suggestive of purpose but at the same time I'm conceding that that's all it can be. Suggestive is the most it can be because whether something has purpose is just a very difficult question. Unless you know that it was designed and you know what the designer was, you can never be sure whether

something has purpose. You can make an educated guess, based on the way it looks.

In order to *confidently* assert the purpose of something, you have to know what the thing or process was that designed it. And so, too, with any human artifact. You can look at a car and be pretty confident that it's designed to move along the road, but the reason you are 100 percent sure is because you know who designed it and why.

Now when we look at the process of evolution, we're in the dark about the designer. That's the question we are grappling with here. If you accept directionality in evolution, you can say things like, "Well, like an animal, evolution seems to develop in a certain direction." Just as an animal matures in a certain direction, evolution seems to develop in a certain direction. And in fact, the combinations of genetic and cultural evolution have led the entire planet to seem increasingly like an integrated organism. Every decade it seems more like that. Every year the Internet seems more like it's drawing people into a giant planetary brain.

So you can point to these patterns that are suggestive of a larger purpose, but you just can't say for sure. My only point is that a scientific worldview gives you more evidence of some larger purpose at work than most scientists concede. And you can argue about what the purpose is, and you can argue about what the nature of the designer would be. It could be that some intelligence set evolution in motion and then went to another universe or something. But I think there is more evidence of purpose than most people concede.

WIE: So what you are saying is that the direction is suggestive of purpose, but that, by definition, if there

is a purpose, we cannot know it scientifically.

RW: We can't know it scientifically, but I do think we can argue intelligently about it on the basis of scientific evidence. In other words, there are facts that are relevant to the question, even if it will forever remain a matter of speculation. For example, whether it's going to rain tomorrow is a matter of speculation. We cannot be 100 percent sure, but there are facts relevant to the question. There are facts that make it more likely or less likely that it's going to rain. So it's in that sense an empirical question, even if we can't pronounce on it with 100 percent certainty. And I think the purpose of evolution is that kind of question.

WIE: *I also understand that the position you hold is not the same as the "intelligent design theorists," those who argue that there is some intelligent force or creativity that is at work in the unfolding of the greater complexity of life. How is what you are saying different?*

RW: Well, they are saying that natural selection is not adequate to account for the growth in complexity. And I'm saying it is.

WIE: *Okay, you are saying that the mechanism of natural selection is enough to account for it all.*

RW: Yes. Now, as I said, why life seems to be accompanied by sentience, by subjective experience, is a mystery in its own right. But once you grant that life does have that property, then I think natural selection can account for the rest. I'm not sure that I'm being clear.

WIE: Well, actually that's very interesting. You said, "Once you

grant that life has sentience." In other words, if life itself has sentience, then natural selection makes sense, and then you can account for everything by natural selection.

RW: What I mean by that is, for example, animals ferociously attacking other animals is accompanied by feelings of hatred, animals affectionately caring for one another is accompanied by feelings of affection, putting your hand in an open flame is accompanied by pain, and so on. Once you accept all that, then natural selection can account for the evolution of human love, human hatred, and so on because it can account for the behaviors that are correlated with those things.

But, as I said earlier, why there is that initial correlation between certain kinds of behavior and certain kinds of sentience, or why sentience exists at all, remains a mystery. So when I say that natural selection can account for everything about being human, when I say it can account for love, and remorse, and compassion, and so on, what I actually mean is that it can account for the behaviors that are accompanied by those feelings. And the existence of feeling in and of itself, the existence of sentience, is a question that in my mind is beyond the scope of natural selection to explain.

But still, there is a clear-cut difference between me and the "intelligent design" people. They don't think you can even get the behaviors out of natural selection. They don't think you can have an organism smart enough to design a 747 produced by natural selection. Leaving aside the question of whether there has to be conscious experience associated with designing a 747, they just don't think you can get the brain cells.

Conscious Evolution

WIE: Do you know who Sri Aurobindo was?

RW: He was in India early in the twentieth century, right?

WIE: Yes, he was part of the independence movement in India. He was also a philosopher and a spiritual sage, and he was nominated for a Nobel prize in poetry—quite a remarkable human being.

RW: I know very little about him. I was just talking to Michael Murphy at Esalen, who is a devotee of his, I think.

WIE: Yes, Michael Murphy does respect Sri Aurobindo immensely. Both Aurobindo and the French Jesuit paleontologist and theologian Teilhard de Chardin, with whose work I know you're very familiar, brought an evolutionary dimension to spiritual life. So I wanted to read you a quote from Sri Aurobindo and get your response to it:

We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher

states which are beyond Mind. In that case, the unconquerable impulse of man towards God, Light, Bliss, Freedom, Immortality presents itself in its right place in the chain as simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind, and appears to be as natural, true, and just as the impulse towards Life which she has planted in certain forms of Matter or the impulse towards Mind which she has planted in certain forms of Life. As there, so here, the impulse exists more or less obscurely in her different vessels with an ever-ascending series in the power of its will-to-be; as there, so here, it is gradually evolving and bound fully to evolve the necessary organs and faculties. . . . The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman, the God. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realization of that which she secretly is. . . . If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realization of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth.

RW: It is a lot to take in. It does sound very Teilhardian in places. It's the kind of speculation that I think scientists should be more open to and less threatened by. Again, if you think clearly about the limitations of science and the difficulty of the problem of consciousness and so on, you have more respect for those kinds of speculations than you would otherwise.

He says evolution doesn't explain why mind evolves, why mind comes out of matter. I think natural selection actually does explain why brains come out of matter and why brains look just as they do, but if, by "mind," you mean the subjective experience, then I think he's right. As for the speculation that the human species is—I don't know how exactly you would put it—the medium of the creation of something larger and in some sense better than us, something that might merit the term "Divine," I think that's the kind of speculation whose legitimacy you appreciate if you really step back and look at the big story that science is telling. If you step back and really look at the movement from the very origin of life to this giant interconnected world we have now, I think you see the kind of directionality that is consistent with that kind of spiritual scenario.

Now at the same time, science certainly can't confirm a scenario like that. But I do think that science is more spiritually suggestive than a lot of scientists acknowledge, and that what you just read is one very plausible line of suggestion.

WIE: *At the end of both The Moral Animal and Nonzero, you speak of our responsibility as human beings to evolve consciously, to embrace the moral implications of what it means to be conscious beings on this planet at this time. You said earlier that if we*

could get the picture of what's actually happening now for us human beings on this planet, then something could happen. But if our brains have been created to respond to an environment that existed hundreds of thousands of years ago, then what even makes it possible for us to be able to do that—to comprehend such a vast picture?

RW: In a sense, it does call for transcendence, in the sense of going beyond your natural instincts, beyond basic self-interest. And this transcendence *can* be of a purely rational sort. In other words, you can just size the situation up and say, for example, "Oh, I get it. If millions of Muslims around the world are mired in poverty and hate America, that's bad for me. Maybe I should do something about it." That's a purely rational version of transcendence. But there is another type of transcendence. If you want to go further and exercise the kind of spiritual discipline that gives you a deeper, more heartfelt appreciation for the plight of people who are very different from you, then that would be a different kind of transcendence. I think both of them are to be commended. If you can manage both of them, then you are to be commended, too. I honestly don't know to what extent the second kind of transcendence is necessary. I certainly think that the sheerly rational kind is important. Policy makers, for example, need to understand the interconnectedness of the world and understand that the welfare of Americans is positively correlated with the welfare of people halfway around the world. That's important. But I don't know if just this rational transcendence is going to be enough. And so, although I think they're both good, of course, it's best when they're symmetrical. So, ideally, we would have both kinds of enlightenment.

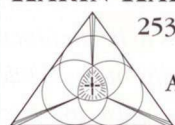
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WIE: *Can you say more about that? What is our role as individuals in this evolutionary event that's happening right now?*

RW: I guess at a mundane level, I'd like to see us all conscious of the need to, if nothing else, keep the experiment going. That is to say, to sustain the living world and give it a chance to evolve further. I think that doing that will require the insight that the fortunes of people around the planet are more and more interconnected, so that more and more people really can do well by doing good. Just keeping the experiment going, that is to say, sustaining a fairly harmonious existence on this planet for human beings, has this morally rich dimension in itself because it does involve more and more thinking about the welfare of others. Then beyond that, it may ultimately have the kind of

spiritual/theological payoff that Sri Aurobindo is referring to. There may be something divine that's in the process of being created, but that we may not live to see. But still our descendants presumably will be part of it in some sense.

WIE: *In Nonzero you hinted that the evolutionary future might involve something happening at a global level—perhaps a giant planetary brain—could you say more about that?*

RW: What I mean is, who knows? Five hundred years from now, maybe the whole kind of technological organism on this planet will be sufficiently cohesive to have a unified field of subjective awareness. Maybe it will be *like something* to be Planet Earth, in a sense. But you know, fifty years ago, well before the Internet, when Teilhard de Chardin coined the term "noosphere," which he called the giant thinking envelope of the earth, he coined that term in conscious relation to the term "biosphere." The idea was very much that the biosphere is akin to the body of the planet and the noosphere the mind of the planet. Well, if he's right that, more and more, there is such a thing as the collective mind of the planet, and that human beings are kind of neurons in some giant global brain, then maybe someday the planet will, in some sense, have a unified consciousness.

WIE: *But I think you are right that it will take a conscious effort to think about our interconnectedness for something truly to change.*

RW: Yes, although some people would be alienated by that kind of scenario, by the idea of some kind of transcendent societal awareness slowly coming into existence.

WIE: *We have no idea what that would be like.*

RW: No, that's true. We don't. I think the concern that people would have is that it would involve a very mechanized, automatic life for individual human beings. Life could be very routinized, whether the mechanism of control was centralized, in a fascistic way, or decentralized. It could still be routinized for the individual humans. I mean, who knows? What scares people is a scenario where we'll be completely subordinate to technology and will slowly lose our freedom to it. I don't know—this is all kind of the twilight zone—but I do think that if we want to be living a nice life thirty years from now and we want our descendants to be living a nice life, fifty or seventy years from now we really have no choice but to increasingly acknowledge the interests and needs of people around the world, and increasingly recognize that we have common interests, common policy interests, and so on.

WIE: *To come together in some greater way.*

RW: Yes, as we are doing incrementally, without really realizing it.

WIE: *What is your hopeful prognosis?*

RW: My hopeful prognosis for the future, generally, of the species? It's that we'll become aware that the basic direction of history has been to make relations among people more nonzero sum, and among polities, more nonzero sum. And we'll become aware that we're entering a time when war is more and more a lose-lose game, and that increasingly, cooperation is the only alternative to a very dismal future. ■

and through looking at the alternatives, this seems to me a more exciting way to go, more interesting, more satisfying—or maybe not more satisfying, but more enjoyable. I spend four months a year in Montana. We don't have television; we don't have newspapers. It took us three weeks to find out that Princess Diana died. So I'm very aware of the beauty of simplicity, of being able to live with the bare minimum and with none of the excitements of living in the big city, of not being in the swim of information constantly. But at the same time, I don't think I would ever give up what humanity has accomplished. I just want to make sure that it's going to be improving rather than falling. I mean, there is still brutality going on that is unprecedented, partly because our technology allows what, in the past, would have been just a scuffle among people to become a possibility of destroying thousands and thousands. So all of this is scary, but at the same time, if I had a choice, I don't think I would want to go back to anything less complex.

WIE: *And what kinds of things impede evolution?*

MC: Well, I think the great religions were all pretty good at pointing this out, whether we're talking about the five precepts of Buddhism or the capital sins of Christianity. You find that those are pretty much on target, in the sense that they all have to do with things like greed—whether it's gluttony or envy—with wanting things for yourself, trying to get things for free from others by stealing, robbing, cheating, or depriving others of their opportunity to lead a good life. So all these things psychologically go against the development of

the soul or the development of complexity because they reduce the person back to his or her biological needs or the conventions of the culture, and they don't allow growth.

WIE: *In The Evolving Self, you introduce, in a contemporary context, what you called the "veils of Maya" as an impediment to our individual evolution because these "veils" distort our sense of reality. Could you speak about that?*

MC: Well, we all tend to take our experience, the surface experience that's presented to consciousness, as essentially being ultimate reality. There's a good reason for that. I mean, we can't examine every experience we have and ask, "Is this right or wrong? Is this good or bad?" But there has to be a certain ability to distance yourself, for instance, from your needs. If every time you're hungry you have to eat, if every time you feel sexual stimulation you want to act it out, if every time somebody tells you to do something you say, "Yes, sir" without thinking about it, then you live a tremendously restricted life. Suppose you are a Nazi, and you're told to take Jews to camp or to do something else like that—and you say, "Yes, sir" because this is what you're told, and this is reality and you feel you cannot do anything about it. If that's how you live, you'll never break out from these conditions, these programs that genes set up over millions of years, or that the culture sets up for us before we were born, or before we grow up. We are born with certain instructions to act, and then we are told by the culture how to act. And while we have to honor the reality of these things, at the same time, we have to reflect on the implications that carrying out these instructions would have.

There is the Hindu notion of karma, which should also be translated in modern terms, because it's true that everything you do, in a sense, has an impact on everything else. We are part of a system, and if we act in a certain way, it doesn't stop there. It will have an effect both now and through time. It will have an effect. So once you realize both that you're part of a system and that you are all these instructions, then you recognize that you have the responsibility of either endorsing all these instructions or trying to break out from them. And that way, you have to begin to pull away these veils of Maya.

WIE: *You also use the term "transcendence" in your work. What do you mean by that?*

MC: Essentially I think it follows on from your prior question. I think transcendence basically means being able to pull aside these veils and say, "Okay. These are the conditions under which I am operating. These are my genetic instructions. These are my cultural instructions, programs. Now, what do I do?" When someone comes out and says, "Yes, everything pushes me in these directions, but given that, I try to understand the consequences of my action to the whole system I live in, including animals, plants, water, air, and all that—and given all that, I'm not going to go along with this program. I'm going to try to take a stand," to me that's transcendence, because it goes beyond the determining forces that the person is seemingly controlled by.

The Cutting Edge

WIE: *You seem to imply in what you write that we need to make an*

evolutionary shift, collectively and as individuals. Could you talk more about that shift?

MC: Yes. You know, I see parts of it. I can't see the whole thing. I don't know what will be there. I don't like top-down pronouncements like "Everyone should do this" or "Everyone should do that." I think we each should reflect on what we can do individually, what our responsibility may be for our community, for our family, or just for ourselves personally—all the way from personal responsibility to what we can do for the nation or the planet. There are so many levels on which one could make a choice that would either enhance or derail evolution. And so my attempt is just to make people aware that they are responsible—they are at the cutting edge of evolution. We all are at the cutting edge of evolution. By our actions we are going to implement the future. And that is where your responsibility is. And let's forget huge plans—let's each think of ourselves as being an instrument, or not an instrument but, in a sense, almost a pseudopod of evolution. We are the evolution to ourselves.

WIE: *Can you say a little more about what it means to be on the cutting edge of evolution?*

MC: Stretching back to this notion of karma, it means that your actions have repercussions all over. You can act in a way that makes evolution more likely to proceed toward complexity, whether by being nice to your spouse or to your children, by trying to teach people, by being a better worker, by getting people to see that good work is more important than what you get for it. By essentially endorsing complexity—looking for ways to enhance

differentiation or uniqueness and to encourage integration or connection with something greater—at each choice point that you encounter in your life, you become evolution. You are then the embodiment of complexity advancing into the future.

WIE: *And all those things that you mentioned—taking responsibility for each other, for our work, for the earth—are very life-affirming. So, does evolution have a purpose?*

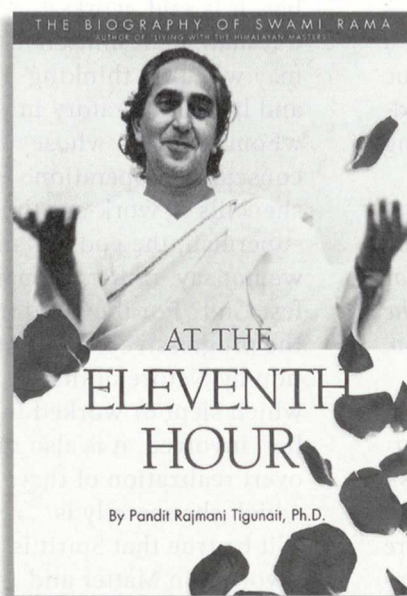
MC: Evolution doesn't have a purpose in the human sense, as far as I know. But because we are human, we can give it a purpose. We are now in the position of being responsible for evolution, for life. It's no longer just a mindless universe. I mean, it is a mindless universe, which has generated through complexity a mind that now has to decide where we want to go.

So, in that sense, now it has a purpose, it seems to me. It's *our* purpose. And we have to decide what that purpose is. What I'm trying to claim is that complexity, which in the past was what evolution generated—whether intentionally or not—has given us the opportunity to say, "Yes. This is what we want to make happen, this is what we want to become the conscious agents of."

WIE: *Two leading spiritual thinkers of the mid-twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo, the Indian spiritual master, philosopher, and poet, and Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit paleontologist, spoke about the purpose of evolution from a spiritual perspective. Aurobindo saw evolution's purpose as divine, already "involved" in matter as well as in human consciousness. God is gradually realized or manifested through evolution. He wrote:*

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realization of that which she secretly is. . . . If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the Divine in himself and the realization of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth.

MC: Yes. Yes, I think that is essentially very well said. I also like the fact that he seems to be putting most of this in a kind of questioning form—is it not? should it not? Because it's true that there is no reason not to look at things that way. In fact, maybe that is the best way to look at it. I find my own responsibility at the edge of what can be known within the terms of my understanding at the moment. And I can posit that there is a lot more beyond that. But what may be there, and what is likely to be there, is not revealed to me. So I don't see positing that as my task. If I were to do that, I would become a religious seer or a guru or something like that. And that's not what I am. So, I don't do that, even though I think it's probably true. ■



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H I M A L A Y A N I N S T I T U T E P R E S S

For the Sake of the Future *continued from p. 131*

Mairead Corrigan Maguire

Co-leader of a
national peace movement
in Northern Ireland



I AGREE WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE the universality of human experience. The spirit of love and compassion, the spirit of celebration of life and of creation, is very important. Everyone follows their own spiritual path; we come into wisdom, or enlightenment, in different ways. But when we do, the whole world is seen as our brothers and sisters, and the earth as our home. So we do need spiritual enlightenment, and we also need a lot of changes in our policies. Our spiritual life should energize us and help us to be politically active. We need both the spiritual world and the

secular world to work together. If we only go by the rational, fear can set in. If we bring the heart to it, we understand that we're interconnected as human beings, and we really have to help each other. Every individual can practice peace in their home or work for peace in their community. Then they will recognize that our common humanity is more important than all the things that divide us, and they'll be able to reach out to the whole world. I'm very hopeful for the future of humanity because I do believe we have this great convergence of science and spiritual life. And I think when we bring those two great influences together, then we have the heart (the compassion and love) and we have the head (the knowledge) to know what to do.

Mairead Corrigan Maguire, together with Betty Williams, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. After her young nephews and niece were accidentally killed in the civil violence that has plagued Ireland for the last thirty years, Corrigan Maguire took to the streets for peace. Her grassroots Peace People Movement has organized the largest nonviolent demonstrations in the history of Northern Ireland, bringing out over a half million people during the time of the greatest number of killings. The organization's work for nonviolent solutions to the conflict in Northern Ireland has garnered broad support throughout England, Ireland, and the international community.