

Education and the Strange Struggle of the Intellectual for Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the strange struggle of intellectuals for enlightenment, and it centres primarily on the teachings of three significant mystics—Sathya Sai Baba and the spiritual colleagues, Aurobindo and the Mother. What say these and others about the highest reaches of humanity, the pinnacle of human accomplishment, its sublimest potential and destiny, its inner light and nature? What role do they give to the intellect in scaling these summits, and why do intellectuals so often resist the climb? For Baba, Aurobindo and the Mother, enlightenment was simply a recognition and a lived awareness of an inner majesty for which “divine” seems the only adequate descriptor.

RESUMÉ: Cet article examine l'étrange lutte de l'intellectuel qui cherche l'illumination, en focalisant essentiellement sur les enseignements de trois mystiques importants: Sathya Sai Baba et ses collègues spirituels, Aurobindo et la Mère. Qu'est-ce que ces trois, et d'autres, disent à propos de l'apogée de la réussite humaine, son destin et potentiel suprême, sa lumière et nature intérieure? Quel rôle attribuent-ils à l'intellect en surmontant ses sommets, et pourquoi les intellectuels résistent-ils si souvent cette escalade? Selon Baba, Aurobindo et la Mère, l'édification était simplement une reconnaissance et une conscience vécue d'une majesté intérieure pour laquelle “divin” semble être la seule description adéquate.

Introduction

Sathya Sai Baba was a mystic and a sage born in Puttaparthi, India, in 1926; he died in 2011. He was characterized as a “world teacher”; schools, colleges and universities were founded on his teachings; and hundreds of books in English alone have emerged about him. His published discourses and monographs amount to at least 14 volumes of commentaries in *Summer Showers* in *Brindavan*, 21 volumes of his *Vahini* (Stream) series, and 42 volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks*—the last alone totaling 12,000 pages. The discourses run from 1953 to 2010. Perhaps no other mystic in history left as rich a legacy of outpourings related to the theme of self-realization and enlightenment.

The essence of Baba’s message was a critique of modern education that largely left out God, Love, and service—that emphasized bookishness, but not personal experience, that craved insight but did not practice it, that soared millions of miles into space but not an inch into the nature and power of one’s own Self.

Aurobindo (1872–1950) was born a Bengali in Calcutta, India. He studied in England at St. Paul’s and King’s College, Cambridge, where he mastered English literature, French literature, Latin, Greek, Italian, German, and Spanish. He later learned Sanskrit. A rare scholar, he was also to become a remarkable yogi (Hees, 1997).

From 1900 to 1908, Aurobindo was a leading advocate of Indian independence. Feared by the British more than any other nationalist, he was arraigned with 32 others for “waging war against the king”—that is, *high treason* (Hees, 1997, p. 56). Awaiting trial, he spent a year in the Alipore jail where he had a striking vision of the Divine in the form of Krishna whom he saw in the “thieves, the murderers, the swindlers” of the prison, and in the prosecutor in the courtroom, and the judge too (Hees, 1997, p. 94). By then, Aurobindo had surrendered to his inner guide who correctly assured him that he would be released.

About to be re-arrested, he fled, heeding the Voice, to Chandernagore in French India, then to Pondicherry, another French territory in India, where he was safer from British designs. There he began to focus not on the liberation of his country but on the liberation of humanity. He sought the uplift of human consciousness itself—an undertaking well beyond even the glow of self-realization.

Mirra Alfassa, born in Paris, France, in 1878, was inwardly highly evolved “even in childhood,” Aurobindo (1953) wrote (p. 454). In her spiritual dreams and visions far from India, a luminous figure often appeared whom she called Krishna, and whom she recognized when first she saw him, as Aurobindo. And Aurobindo in turn saw in her the power of the Divine Mother.

Mirra first met Aurobindo in Pondicherry in 1914, but their spiritual collaboration began six years on when she returned for life. In 1926 Aurobindo entrusted the ashram to her, and she became known affectionately as the Mother,

while he went into seclusion for a quarter century to complete the task, he said, of transforming life "by bringing down into it the Light, Power and Bliss of the divine Truth and its dynamic certitudes" (1953, p. 150). In this time and earlier, he produced 30 volumes of writings. Before 1900, he had begun the 23,000-line poem, *Savriti: A Legend and a Symbol*, which he revised continually until his death in 1950.

Scholars, Science, and Sages

Throughout their long careers, Aurobindo, the Mother, and Sai Baba constantly interacted with intellectuals, scholars, academics, pedants, and pundits. They knew the nature of the academic mind, and they cautioned listeners and readers about some of its propensities.

Sai Baba told this story: Ten crossed a river, and they wondered if they were all safe on the other side, so they counted, and all agreed there were only nine left—someone had drowned. They were wailing in agony when a passerby counted the group again, and found there were ten all right—no one had drowned at all. Each person had counted everyone but himself.

"This is the mistake every one of these encyclopedic intellects commit," said Baba (1972); "they count everyone except themselves; they know everything except the workings of their own minds, and the methods by which they can attain inner calm" (pp. 222-23).

One day a celebrated savant appeared at Sri Yukteswar's ashram in India, bent on impressing the master. Yukteswar was then instructing the young Paramahansa Yogananda, who in 1920 would create the Self-Realization Fellowship in California and in 1946 the spiritual classic, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. In the corner the day the savant visited, Yogananda was sitting discreetly listening. Said he, "The rafters resounded as the guest recited passages from the *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads*, and *bhasyas* (commentaries) of Shankara."

When at last the pedant took breath, Yukteswar, said simply, "I am waiting to hear you."

"Quotations there have been in superabundance. But what original commentary can you supply, from the uniqueness of your particular life? What holy text have you absorbed and made your own? In what ways have these timeless truths renovated your nature? Are you content to be a hollow victrola [record player] mechanically repeating the words of other men?"

Yogananda, nearby, could scarcely contain his mirth.

"I give up!" the scholar admitted. "I have no inner realization."

"These bloodless pedants smell unduly of the lamp," Yukteswar commented after the chastened one left. "They consider philosophy to be a gentle intellectual setting-up exercise. Their elevated thoughts are carefully unrelated either to the crudity of outward action or to any scouring inner discipline."

Mere book learning was ever incomplete.

"Do not confuse understanding with a larger vocabulary," Yukteswar warned. "Sacred writings are beneficial in stimulating desire for inward realization, if one stanza at a time is slowly assimilated. Otherwise, continual intellectual study may result in vanity, false satisfaction, and undigested knowledge.

"When your conviction of a truth is not merely in your brain but in your being, you may diffidently vouch for its meaning" (Yogananda, 1972, pp. 134-35).

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was another spiritual adept, one who spoke to crowds the world over for decades. A master who implored listeners to reject masters, an authority who advised audiences to shun authority, Krishnamurti urged all seekers inward to the Truth in themselves. He had a long friendship with Aldous Huxley, a remarkable intellectual and author of the spiritual gem, *The Perennial Philosophy*. "Aldous had tremendous knowledge about everything," said Krishnamurti. "He was a living encyclopedia. You could ask him about anything, and he would be able to give a learned lecture on it, whether it was religion, music or the arts, a rare insect or a plant." Pausing, Krishnamurti added, "But he realized that his immense knowledge was a burden and prevented him from experiencing things afresh. All that stored-up memory kept him from coming into contact with the new and original." And Aldous knew it. Sometimes he said to Krishnamurti, "I would gladly give up everything, all my learnedness and knowledge, to capture of a glimpse of that, for one direct perception of the truth" (Krohn, 1997, p. 137).

It was not just the perception that Huxley was after, but the *feeling* of the perception. Similarly with the savant in Yukteswar's ashram, it was the *feeling* of personal renovation that was missing. One can possess infinite information about courage, for example, but if he does not feel it, it's not really there. Or he could have read every book on self-trust, but if he did not feel it, he doesn't have it, he's not being it.

There was a very big difference between knowing and being, added Baba (1965). "The scholarship which revels in the number of texts mastered is of no use; one may know the *Sastras* and the *Upanishads* upside down; he may have all the seven hundred *slokas* (verses) of the *Gita* in his head, but, if *achara* and *vichara* are non-existent, it is a burden which is best avoided. *Achara* means application in practice. *Vichara* means continuous self-examination." Practice, with self-awareness was the key. One did not have to learn all the commentaries by rote and compete in an exhibition of erudition with other pundits. "It is enough if you put into practice one sloka, the one that suits your spiritual stage, that appeals to you most," said Baba (pp. 142-43). Learning and scholarship tended toward egoism and pride, so he himself was "drawn only by devotion" [genuine feeling and love] (1963-64, p. 174).

Repeatedly, Baba warned about preaching without acting which he had seen so often in *vedanthins* and self-styled scholars. In one parable, he told of a pandit who had mastered all the scriptures, knew them by heart, and preached

them by rote. The pandit got his milk from a milkmaid who came from afar every morning in her deliveries. But she was never punctual, so he asked why. She had to cross a river en route, she replied, but the boatman preferred the wealthier customers, so she often had to await the second crossing. Mocking her ignorance, the pandit told her: "If only you chant the name of God... you do not need the boat at all, for the river will part and give way to you." A simple solution, he chided. The woman had full faith in the wisdom and authority of the learned one, and immediately began practicing the name of God. The next morning she uttered "Narayana," one of the Lord's names, and instantly the waters parted, and she walked across and delivered the milk on time. After several punctual deliveries, the pandit asked the reason, and she said she had simply followed his advice.

Now the pandit had no belief in his own learning; he knew what the scriptures said, but he had no faith in them. So he decided to test the veracity of the milkmaid's story. He went to the river the next day, he "chanted the name but without full faith," he lifted his *dhoti* [lower garment] in case it might get soaked, he stepped into the current, and was drowned. "This is the fate of a person who preaches, but lacks faith in his own preaching," said Baba (1998). "The illiterate woman had no doubt at all..." (pp. 158-59).

More importantly, the projects of many scholars and scientists did not address their deepest, personal and social needs. "Do not envy the countries that are attempting to reach the Moon and Mars and to explore the reaches of outer space," Baba (1961) said. "Of what avail is it to master those regions while remaining slaves to every gust of malice or fear? Of what avail is it to travel at ten thousand miles per hour with a mind weighted down by dark impulses of the savage past?" (p. 132). "Be thankful to the scientist for the inventions, the manipulations of material forces and objects," he said, "but do not give him more reverence than he deserves. Science can confer ease and comfort, alleviate disease, analyze objects. It cannot confer calmness, equanimity, peace and bliss. It can improve the cart, make it firmer, more mobile; but, it cannot improve or inspire the horse" (1968, p. 98).

The world was full of plutocrats, pundits and scientists, acknowledged Baba (1983), "but if none has compassion and kindness their wealth or knowledge is [useless]" (p. 140). If the experts lack purity of consciousness and elevating ideals, "they do more harm than good." They will promote neither happiness nor peace. "They will pass through life without awareness of its sanctity or sublimity" (1975-77, p. 99). Without the values of truth, righteousness, peace, and love, "the accumulation of scholarship is a barren achievement. Without them all charities and services rendered to others are ineffective. Without them, positions of authority ...become positions of persecution" (p. 110).

Moreover, it was an illusion to think that "happiness consists in accumulating money or knowledge or comforts or reputation," said Baba (1970). Trying to be happy through such accumulation is like getting into the Madras

bus and hoping to reach Bangalore" (pp. 219–220). Or, for North Americans, getting in the Seattle bus hoping to reach Dallas.

"Man has mastered astronomy; he knows all about the earth," lamented Baba (1978–80). "He is conversant with all that is happening in America, Russia and England. But he does not know who he is, and so, all other knowledge does not make him wise. He is eager to collect information about everything else but he never asks the question, 'who am I?' though he uses the expression 'I' and 'my' almost always" (p. 256). The question unasked is the main one he *should* ask.

"Many describe science today as a powerful acquisition," said Baba (1981–82), "but science holds before mankind a great opportunity, that is all. It cannot be as great a power as it is imagined to be. If it is devoid of character, it brings disaster." Intelligence could be found among very clever thieves too (p. 98). In the Hindu epic, *The Ramayana*, the ten-headed demon, Ravana, was master of 64 types of knowledge, he knew the language of animals, birds and insects, and he was endowed with all power. But in kidnapping Rama's wife Sita, he exhibited a fatal flaw—insatiable lust. Concluded Baba (1987), "Whatever one's scholarship or wealth or strength, if he has no control over his senses, he descends to the depths of degradation" (p. 51). If he does not know how to hold his mind steady, how can he achieve serenity? (1993, p. 52).

Baba's discourses repeatedly critiqued a common form of education. "Teaching has become a process of transmission from head to head," he (1984) said. "Teachers teach with the head, and students listen to them with the head. Students go to the examination hall with a head-load of information, empty it out on the answer books, and return home empty-headed." Preparation for a job was more important than preparation for life; facts were more important than virtues; grades were more important than character. A degree may awarded, but to what good for those around? "True teaching goes straight to the heart and imprints itself permanently on the hearts of the students" (p. 43).

There were three kinds of teachers, said Baba: "those who complain, complain, complain; those who explain, explain, explain; and those who inspire" (Jones, 2008, p. 55). Those who inspired, were teachers of the heart, and they were too few. Einstein spent sleepless nights, and Gandhi was saddened. When asked why, they both answered, "the hardness which the heart gains through education." Both went through such a system, and both retorted, "I am what I am not because of it, but in spite of it!" (Baba, 1981–82, p. 185).

Until the moment of his death, Baba claimed this system was still largely in place in India, and throughout the world. It was a system that underplayed or ignored the radiance of the Self, the spirituality of being, the virtues of peace, right action, truth, non-violence, and especially of love. A system that ignored the Divinity latent in each person, and thus a system short of the profoundest inspiration imaginable. Students were "Children of Immortality," as the ancient richis of India had described them, said Baba (1973–74). "Do not turn them into experts in mathematics, unable to add up a simple domestic bill; scholars in the

geography of America, but unable to direct a pilgrim to [the shrine of] Kaashi; prodigies in algebra who are helpless when asked to define the area of their own homes; past masters in drill and gymnastics, but all at sea when requested to sit in the *Padmasana* [Yogic] posture; proficient in Botany but ignorant of the uses of the common Thulsi plant found in the courtyard of every Indian home" (pp. 106–07).

For Baba the ultimate authority was not reason but Spirit, the God within, the Higher Self, or what he called the *Atma*. "Those who have neither authority nor adeptness have to hear, study, analyze and judge. Authority is the right of the *Atma* alone. It is the *Atma* that can command." And awareness of the *Atma* was primarily a feeling. "For me, the purity of your feeling is important, not the depth of your scholarship" (Baba, 1962, p. 90).

Indian and European Metaphysical Thought

It was this feeling that set Indian metaphysical thought apart from its European facsimile. Sri Aurobindo was a master of both approaches. "European metaphysical thought," he (1970) said, "—even in those thinkers who tried to prove or explain the existence and nature of God or of the Absolute—does not in its methods and results go beyond the intellect. But the intellect is incapable of knowing the supreme Truth; it can only range about seeking for Truth and catching fragmentary representations of it" (p. 157). The mind could not arrive at Truth, only a hypothetical construction of it, and without any basic agreement with other minds, as was demonstrated by the entire history of European philosophy (Hawkins, 2002, p. 289). "At the end of European thought, therefore, there must always be Agnosticism, declared or implicit," said Aurobindo (1970). "Intellect, if it goes sincerely to its own end, has to return and give this report: 'I cannot know; there is, or at least it seems to me that there may be or even must be Something beyond, some ultimate Reality, but about its truth I can only speculate; it is either unknowable or cannot be known by me'" (p. 157).

In India, as in the West, metaphysical thinkers tried "to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect." But in India, mental thinking was not given "the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status," said Aurobindo (1970). "The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; an intellectual conclusion that contradicts this supreme authority is held invalid." In the West, the opposite happened: "Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end; in philosophy, thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the Truth is to be discovered; even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid—just the reverse of the Indian position." Western thought, said Aurobindo, had "ceased to be dynamic: it has sought after a theory of things, not after realization." Increasingly it became purely intellectual, purely academic, an "intellectual

speculation only, without any practical ways and means for the attainment of Truth by spiritual experiment, spiritual discovery, a spiritual transformation." Western thinkers were, of course, as competent as any Eastern sage, *intellectually*. But "it is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self, which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe" (pp. 159-60).

Neither Aurobindo nor the Mother associated with his mission depreciated the value of reason as a necessary part of the evolution of humanity. As the Mother (1977) explained, it was not that "reason must disappear for one to become wise... not at all.... [But] reason must no longer be the summit and the master." For a long while, admittedly, it must rule and regulate, "otherwise one is the plaything of one's impulses, one's fancies, one's more or less disordered emotional imaginings, and one is in danger of being very far removed not merely from wisdom but even from the knowledge needed for conducting oneself acceptably." But once one has controlled the lower impulses through reason, she said, "which is the apex of ordinary human intelligence," if one wanted to go beyond that, "if one wants to liberate oneself from ordinary life, from ordinary thought, from the ordinary vision of things, one must... stand upon the head of reason, not trampling it down disdainfully, but using it as a stepping stone to something higher, something beyond it... which receives its inspirations from above, from high above, from the divine Wisdom" (pp. 14-15).

One aspect of this "something beyond" could be found in yoga. "The logical or debating mind could never comprehend Yoga," said Aurobindo (1970), a master Yogi himself. "A doubting spirit, 'honest doubt' and the claim that the intellect shall be satisfied and be made the judge on every point is all very well in the field of mental action outside." But yoga was not "a mental field"; the consciousness that has to be established is not a mental, logical, or debating consciousness—it is even laid down by yoga that unless and until the mind is still, including the intellectual or logical mind, and opens itself in quietude or silence to a higher and deeper consciousness, vision and knowledge, *sadhana* [spiritual inquiry] cannot reach its goal." In the Indian spiritual tradition, once the disciple and the Master accept each other, openness to the Guru and faith in his wisdom, is required. "Blame, criticism, attack on the Guru... was considered reprehensible and the surest obstacle to *sadhana*" (p. 162).

Doubt existed in both settings, East and West, but perhaps it was more deeply imbedded in the European intellectual approach, as a protection against logical or rational error and as a reminder of the need for empirical verification. But for Aurobindo (1970) logic was of no assistance in spiritual illumination; neither was it helpful in alleviating doubt. "If the spirit of doubt could be overcome by meeting it with arguments," logical arguments might be fruitful, he declared. But "not even 6000 convincing pages would convince doubt. For doubt exists for its own sake; its very function is to doubt always, and, even

when convinced, to go on doubting still; it is only to persuade its entertainer to give it board and lodging that it pretends to be an honest truth seeker. The spirit of doubt is insatiable and unappeasable." The only way to get rid of it was to take the discrimination of one's highest impulse and "under its guard to open the door freely and courageously to experience." Logic could not remove doubt, but experience could, experience guided by faith (pp. 162–63, 167–68). "It is not an ignorant but a luminous faith, the faith in light and not in darkness. It is called blind by the skeptical intellect because it refuses to be guided by outward appearances or seeming facts,—for it looks for the truth behind,—because it does not walk on the crutches of proof and evidence. It is an intuition not only waiting for experience to justify it but leading towards experience." Doubt with its thousand questions could be surmounted only by an enlargement of consciousness, a deeper seeing and feeling. Said Aurobindo (1970), "If I believe in self-healing, I shall after a time find out the way to heal myself. If I have faith in transformation, I can end by laying my hand on and unravelling the process of transformation. But if I begin with doubt, and go on with more doubt, how far am I likely to go on the journey?" (p. 166).

The inner Voice that guided Aurobindo in escaping British prosecution in India came as a sudden insight and intuition that overarched all doubt and logical reservation. It was a spiritual experience that magnified his faith in more of the same. Speaking more generally, he (1970) averred:

It is very plain that in the experience itself, the intellect cannot claim to put its limits or its law on an endeavor whose very name, principle and matter is to go beyond the domain of the ordinary earth-ruled and sense-ruled mental intelligence. It is as if I were asked to climb a mountain with a rope around my feet attaching me to the terrestrial level or to fly only on condition that I keep my feet on the earth while I do it. It may be the safest thing to walk on earth and be on firm ground always and to ascend on wings or otherwise may be to risk a collapse and all sorts of accidents of error, evolution, illusion, extravagance, hallucination or whatnot—the usual charges of the positive earth walking intellect against mystic experience; but I have to take the risk if I want to do it at all."

The mystic went beyond the reasoning intellect into a realm where the mental basis takes leave:

where these data are exceeded, where there is another law and canon of perception and knowledge. His entire business is to break through these borders into another consciousness which looks at things in a different way and though this new consciousness may include the data of the ordinary external intelligence it cannot be limited by them or bind itself to see from the intellectual standpoint or in accordance with its way

of conceiving, reasoning, established interpretation of experience. A mystic entering the domain of the... Spirit with the intellect as his only or his supreme light or guide would risk seeing nothing... (p. 181).

For those who would make the intellect "the standard and judge of spiritual experience," Aurobindo (1970) asked a single, probing question: "Is the Divine something less than mind or is it something greater? Is mental consciousness with its groping inquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status?" If it were greater, why would one bother seeking the Divine? If it were equal, spiritual experience would be redundant. "But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or witness before its tribunal, summon it to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin it like an insect under its examining microscope?" (p. 170).

In siding with the Divine, Aurobindo declared:

If mankind only caught a glimpse of what infinite enjoyments, what perfect forces, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not yet conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures. But the way is narrow, the doors are hard to force, and fear, distrust and s[k]epticism are there, sentinels of Nature, to forbid the turning away of our feet from her ordinary pastures (The Mother, 1977, p. 11).

In one of his aphorisms, Aurobindo asserted: "I am not a *Jnani* [one who seeks enlightenment through knowledge], for I have no knowledge except what God gives me for His work. How am I to know whether or what I see be reason or Folly? For me, it is neither; for the thing seen is simply true and neither folly nor reason." In explaining the aphorism, the Mother (1977) spoke of the power and feeling of the superconscious mind, linked with the Divine:

It is an admirable state; it is peace of mind. There is no longer any need to accumulate acquired knowledge, received ideas which have to be memorized; it is no longer necessary to clutter one's brain with thousands and thousands of things in order to have at one's command, when the time comes, the knowledge that is needed to perform an action, to impart a teaching, to solve a problem. The mind is silent, the brain is still, everything is clear, quiet, calm; and at the right moment, by Divine Grace a drop of light falls into the consciousness and what needs to be known is known. Why should one care to remember—why try to retain that knowledge? On the day or at

the moment that it is needed one will have it again. At each second one is a blank page in which what must be known will be inscribed—in the peace, the repose, the silence of a perfect receptivity (p. 10).

By linking to the Divine wisdom within, one knew what had to be known. The inner source was the authority, the truth, and it was vaster by far than reason. Surrendering to this inner voice was the key, said the Mother (1977) and surrendering required “self-forgetfulness, a total self-giving, [and] the absence of ego” (p. 10).

Because masters who have reached this state have access to all knowledge through their superconscious minds, or the Power and Wisdom within, they often surprise professors and scientists who speak to them with “precise insight into their specialized fields of knowledge,” as Yogananda (1971) said of his teacher Yukteswar (p. 133). Scientist David Bohm experienced this with Krishnamurti, psychiatrist Samuel Sandweiss, with Sai Baba, and psychologists Helen Schucman, William Thetford and Gerald Jampolsky, with Jesus of *A Course in Miracles*. Yukteswar read little save for the ancient Hindu scriptures, yet Yogananda said, “When he so desired Master could instantly attune himself to the mind of any man” (p. 133).

Resolution for the Intellectual

Perhaps a few more illustrations might be helpful regarding the education of the intellectual who might seek enlightenment.

Baba (1969) often spoke of Lord Dakshinamurty, the divine teacher of spiritual wisdom, who once strolled slowly along the sea-beach, meditating: He watched the waves and the unending roll of breakers, and he saw a piece of rubbish on the crest of a wave in the distance that was being passed on crest after crest, until it was cast upon the shore. Dakshinamurty said to the Ocean: “You are boundless and fathomless. Can’t you make some room for this poor stuff? It is highly selfish on your part not to tolerate this poor thing despite your vastness.” The Ocean answered fittingly: “Lord, if today I allow this piece of dirt to remain with me ere long I will be filled with flotsam and jetsam and my entire form will be changed. Mine is neither egoism nor anger; it is only the duty of self-preservation. I should not allow the slightest blot to deface my grandeur. If I allow this twig to mar my splendour, it will be the first step in my downfall” (p. 77).

Misdeeds, misconceptions, scum, sullage, impurities, must be cast off so the sea remains its unspoiled, pristine self.

“Likewise,” said Baba, “every person should keep out even the smallest bad thought the moment it seeks the mind. To treat it as small and inconsiderable would mean allowing such things to enter the mind and in due course fill it entirely.” Gradually the person changes. “His... essence is undermined” (Krishna Murty, 1994, pp. 186–87).

What Baba was saying to the intellectual and the non-intellectual alike, was that our real nature is Spirit, pure Spirit, and it cannot hold taint, toxin, or foreign matter, and still be itself. The foam and fragments, the sludge and the settlings of muck and refuse, all must be expelled—everything alien to that spiritual nature. The imperfections of our humanness, our doubts, our defensiveness, our self-diminishing thoughts, our resentments, regrets, foibles, fears, our condemnations, negativity, cynicism, our mistakes, misconceptions, misappreciations, our sense of lack and loss and unworthiness, and for the intellectual particularly, the pride, the judgments, the conclusions, and the ego—all must be thrown upon the shore.

A second illustration of Baba's approach.... Years ago a discouraged devotee told Baba, "The world is very cruel to me."

"That is its nature," answered Baba. "The purpose of the world is frustration; it has to engender need. When the need is strong enough, the individual seeks fulfillment."

"And fails!" cried the devotee.

"Only when he seeks fulfillment without! Within him, he can get it. The within is accessible always; it is ever responsible. There is pain only so long as attachment for outer forms remains."

Baba then spoke of something the devotee may not have understood—of how the mind had to neutralize its tendency to react "to something as pain and something else as pleasure" which then stuck in the memory and imposed a world of duality of grief and joy." He was not speaking of physical pain as much as the pain of multiple judgments and negative interpretations of experience. It was the grief, the pain, that eventually drove one to Spirit, to the Power within.

"Which I can, at best, only hope to attain," the downcast devotee remarked.

"God asks for neither hope nor despair. They are subject to relativity. Universal Being is beyond both hope and despair, both certainty and doubt. It knows no lingering in its conclusions. It is ever flowing, in all directions, and in none of them."

Spirit did not careen from positivity to negativity, from uplift to dejection. It simply *was*, and it did not know depression. It was free and flowing, expanding infinitely, never stuck on a single track, never stopped anywhere, never ended. Resisting this flow by clinging to old ways and concepts was a form of self-strangulation.

"What then shall be my direction?" asked the devotee.

"Take what works today for today. What works for tomorrow for tomorrow. One day at a time, each day for itself, each moment for itself, without a past, without memory, without conclusions."

"Conclusions?"

"Yes," said Baba. "Conclusions bind; they press on the mind. The newborn baby is not confined to conclusions. All conclusions enslave. Most men are slaves to the conclusions into which they have fallen" (Conversation, 2008).

Conclusions choked off further growth, further life, and they took many forms—concluding a single step as the final one, a single insight as the culminating one, a single judgment as the last word, a single interpretation as the end-all.

It was reminiscent of Shakespeare's dictum, "Make not your thoughts your prisons." Krishnamurti called Aldous Huxley's problem of encyclopedic knowledge and no inner awareness the burden of the known, and he urged freedom from the known, which was partly all the things one had drawn conclusions about. For once one had the conclusion, no more understanding could enter, or at least, the conclusion resisted other conclusions, other insights. In some ways, it was like the weight of prejudice. It seems that the force with which a person holds a conclusion is also the force of his resistance to other ways of seeing the same thing. One could, of course, conclude that Reason was the highest court, the end of Wisdom; in fact, one could conclude *anything* and hold to the conclusion with the fiercest pride, but the conclusion always marked the cessation of further inquiry, further growth, sudden, intuitive advance.

More importantly, "there was the problem of all problems, the problem of peripheral or central being," said Baba. One could be "buffeted endlessly" by the elements from outside, or one could "remain in the calm center of the cyclone."

"The circumference or the center, the rim or the hub of the wheel?" asked the devotee.

"Yes, the hub is calm, steady, unmoved. But the mind will be drawn along the spokes, the objective desires, to revolve over mud and stone, sand and thorns. It will not believe that it can get bliss from the center, rather than from the circumference, without undergoing a rough journey over turbulent terrain."

In the center was the Power, and once that fact was embraced, the turnings of the human mind could no longer wreak their havoc by alienating a soul from its own essence, or by whispering the ultimate heresy that the Spirit is weak (Conversation, 2008).

A final illustration of Baba's approach....

Baba's long letter to Pandit Veerabhadra Sarma in Professor Kasturi's four volume biography of Baba is one of the richest expositions of the counsel he offered to a great scholar to show the scholar what he had to discard and what he had to embrace in order to achieve *happiness*, a fundamental mark of enlightenment. The letter is remarkable for its focus and compassion and for its revelation of Baba's knowing of things beyond the awareness of the normal conscious mind, an awareness vouched for by devotees, non-devotees, and writers repeatedly (Haraldsson, 1997; Kasturi, nd.; Krystal, 1994; Mason & Laing, 1982; Murphet 1997; Sandweiss, 1975).

Pandit Veerabhadra Sarma was a great Vedic scholar and renowned orator who could expound on the sacred scriptures with crystal clarity and vivid eloquence. A minstrel, a poet, a writer, he had achieved every honor in life and every recompense but material wealth.

So acute was his poverty that he blamed Sai Baba for spurning him and loading upon him grief after grief. Seeing his misjudgment, his wife offered to write Baba for relief. But Sarma would have nothing of it. "No prayer should proceed from either of us to Baba, who has mercilessly betrayed our trust," he declared on 20 January 1962. Sensing Sarma's gall at that very moment, eight hundred miles away, Baba drafted a letter that reached Sarma on the 23rd. It was an intellectual's *Gita*, a song of empathic counsel to the piqued scholar.

"Dear child Veerabhadram!" it read. "You are *bhadram* [secure, happy, full of confidence and joy], aren't you? You might ask, 'what kind of *bhadram* is this?'"

When life flows clear and smooth with no hurdles to cross, to feel that it is so because of oneself and to forget God, and when that flow encounters obstacles and obstructions at every turn, to lament and lose heart—are these not signs of the intellectual frailty inherent in man? You, too, are human, dear *Bhadram*, therefore it is no wonder that you are overcome by depression and despair when troubles bother and obstruct you at every step.

Though the life of man is basically a manifestation of Immortality and an unbroken stream of *ananda* [bliss], he strays away from the awareness of the *atman* [the inner Spirit] the spring of that *ananda*, slavishly yielding to the vagaries of the mind, the intellect and the ego. Sinking and floating, rising and falling on the turbid waves of the sea of delusion, he is tossed between anxiety and calm, grief and joy, pain and pleasure. He is afflicted with the evanescence of the world and the unreality of his desires.

Why are you confounded and confused by this false panorama? Remember, you are thereby despising and denying your own *atmic* identity. You have stored in your brain the Vedas, the *Sastras*, the *Puranas*, the *Ithihasas*, and the Upanishads, but you behave like a dull boor. You bewail your lot and weep at your plight as if you had no resources to fall back upon. This attitude is not worthy of the learning you have accumulated. You have to draw strength and courage therefrom and further the blossoming of holy, heartening thoughts.

Should this one single trouble—want of money—make you stoop in weakness and fear? You have with you the Name which is the *Dhanavanthri* (Divine Physician) for all the ills and anxieties of man. Instead of letting that Name dance joyously on your tongue, why are you paying so much attention to what you call loss, grief and worry?

You are the repository of so many branches of scriptural scholarship, but you have neither realized their value nor

attempted to experience the joy they can give you. This must be your prime goal. Instead, you are spending your days in the mere satisfaction of having acquired this knowledge, as if fluent oratory were the best purpose to which you could devote your learning. The result is that you are led into the baseless belief of being attacked by anxieties and adversities.

“Really speaking, these are all objective phenomena, passing clouds that are but a feature of the external nature. The *ananda* that the *atman* can confer on you cannot be lessened or hindered in the least. Have firm faith in this truth. Don’t you know, *bangaroo* [meaning gold, applied to a child who is charming and well-behaved], the freedom, the delight and the tranquility you can derive by contemplation of the *ananda* that the unbroken awareness of the *atman* can endow you with? Knowing this, even if you are confronted by the seemingly most insurmountable problem, how can you get entangled with or be affected by circumstances and phenomena in the objective world?

To preach to others is quite easy, but to put even a fraction of what is preached into actual practice and experience the felicity promised, is extremely difficult. You have been announcing in ringing tones that ‘Swami knows everything; Swami is the unitive embodiment of all the names and forms by which man has adored God down the ages.’ But when problems overwhelm you, you forget to establish these truths in your own life.

Don’t I know? The other day, when you had been reduced to plead with your father for help and when you were about to proceed to where he resides, your wife suggested, ‘we shall write to Swami about our troubles and losses,’ let me ask why you told her, ‘I won’t allow this; you should not write’? I shall even tell you the reason. You thought she might inform me about various other details. Don’t I know? Can I know this only if she writes to me? Foolish *bangaroo*! “Don’t I know that you went to Ramachandrapuram to give a series of talks on the *Gita* and returned with a minus balance? The *Gita* discourses did not receive the response you expected because your talk was pervaded and polluted by the *Burrakatha* style that has long struck root in you [a narration accompanied by song that oft had a socio-political message; it was banned by the British in India]. It cannot be easily overcome. Bear with it patiently and, with steady effort, be rid of it. If you desire that your *Gita* lectures be appreciated, some improvements are called for. Without effecting them, why do you moan, be gloomy and

dejected, blaming your scholarship and your experience as mere useless loads.

...Study is not all-important. Practising what you have learnt is very necessary. My purpose is to bring to your notice this facet of the process of learning.

Let me tell you this. He who plants a sapling cannot but water it; if he had no will to water it, he would not have planted it at all. ... Be bold; be in bliss; take up the burden of the duties assigned to you.... I will never give you up. I will not forget you, no, never.

You have been maligning the rich; give up this erroneous habit. Not only the rich but you should not dishonour any one in any way. If they are bloated in their ego, *they* will suffer. How can it affect you? Remember, Sai resides in all; so maligning another means maligning Sai himself.

Convey my blessings to your wife and children. I have written this long letter out of the compassion and love that I bear towards you. Be ever in joy; be ever intent on practice and experience. The Resident of your heart, Sai" (Kasturi, nd., pp. 163-67).

Conclusion

There is a much greater complexity to the message, meaning and communication of Sathya Sai Baba than I have conveyed here. After all, he compiled nearly eighty volumes of texts and discourses over more than half a century, he spoke to countless aspirants and visitors, and he had hundreds of books written about him. Perhaps a first tentative step in applying his curriculum is daring to simplify it. In seeking a new society, he said in countless ways, in re-organizing our schools and our world, humanity at its peril could never relinquish God, Love, Service and Practice.

For Baba, Aurobindo and the Mother, enlightenment was simply a recognition and a lived awareness of an inner majesty so radiant, so loving and vast that "Divine" seems the only adequate descriptor. Each of them taught in what I (2009) once called *The Sea of the Self Academy*, a school for self-realization... (p. 11). A strange academy, it began millennia ago, with the dawn of consciousness, and begins again with each new moment. Strange too, with no set enrolment, it opens to a single, sincere soul. Unlike other academies that relish complexity, it favors simplicity, and unlike those that contract into tiny specialties, it expands always and all ways, from the workings of subatomic energy to the wonder of universal love. Other schools claim many goals, but the Academy, only one—to awaken the Power and Wisdom of the Self—to create a life of limitless extension beyond the ego, of union with the highest conception and the infinite possibility, a life of beatitude and delight.

There is equality among teachers and students in this school, and no age limit for either. The student can be a child, and so can the teacher, for a teacher is one who has accepted what she or he is, and that can happen early or late. No fortune or fee is required, merely attention. No great scholarship or intellect is needed, merely humility and openness.

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