

# **The Sunlit Path**



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## Contents



To the Students, Young and Old

The Mother



The National Value of Art

Sri Aurobindo



## To the Students, Young and Old

### The Mother

THERE are, in the history of the earth, moments of transition when things that have existed for thousands of years must give way to those that are about to manifest. A special concentration of the world consciousness, one might almost say, an intensification of its effort, occurs at such times, varying according to the kind of progress to be made, the quality of the transformation to be realised. We are at precisely such a turning-point in the world's history. Just as Nature has already created upon earth a mental being, man, so too there is now a concentrated activity in this mentality to bring forth a supramental consciousness and individuality.

Certain beings who, I might say, are in the secret of the gods, are aware of the importance of this moment in the life of the world, and they have taken birth on earth to play their part in whatever way they can. A great luminous consciousness broods over the earth, creating a kind of stir in its atmosphere. All who are open receive a ripple from this eddy, a ray of this light and seek to give form to it, each according to his capacity.

We have here the unique privilege of being at the very centre of this radiating light, at the fount of this force of transformation.

Sri Aurobindo, incarnating the supramental consciousness in a human body, has not only revealed to us the nature of the path to follow and the way to follow it in order to reach the goal, but has also by his own

personal realisation given us the example; he has provided us, so to say, with the proof that the thing can be done and that the time has come to do it.

Consequently, we are not here to repeat what others have done, but to prepare ourselves for the blossoming of a new consciousness and a new life. That is why I address myself to you, the students, that is, to all who wish to learn, to learn always more and always better, so that one day you may be capable of opening yourselves to the new force and of giving it the possibility of manifesting on the physical plane. For that is our programme and we must not forget it. To understand the true reason why you are here, you must remember that we want to become instruments that are as perfect as possible, instruments that express the divine will in the world. And if the instruments are to be perfect, they must be cultivated, educated, trained. They must not be left like fallow land or a formless piece of stone. A diamond reveals all its beauty only when it is artistically cut. It is the same for you. If you want your physical being to be a perfect instrument for the manifestation of the supramental consciousness, you must cultivate it, sharpen it, refine it, give it what it lacks, perfect what it already possesses.

That is why you go to school, my children, whether you are big or small, for one can learn at any age — and so you must go to your classes. Sometimes, if you are not in a very good mood, you say, “How boring it is going to be!” Yes, perhaps the teacher who is taking your class does

not know how to amuse you. He may be a very good teacher, but at the same time he may not know how to entertain you, for it is not always easy. There are days when one does not feel like being entertaining. There are days, for him as for you, when one would like to be elsewhere than in school. But still, you go to your class. You go because you must, for if you obey all your fancies you will never have any control over yourselves; your fancies will control you. So you go to your class, but instead of going there and thinking, "How bored I am going to be; I am sure it is not going to be interesting", you should tell yourselves, "There is not a single minute in life, not one circumstance that is not an opportunity for progress. So what progress am I going to make today? The class I am going to now is on a subject that does not interest me. But perhaps that is because something is lacking in me; perhaps, in my brain, a certain number of cells are deficient and that is why I cannot find any interest in the subject. If so, I shall try, I shall listen carefully, concentrate hard and above all drive out of my mind this aimlessness, this superficial shallowness which makes me feel bored when there is something I cannot grasp. I am bored because I do not make an effort to understand, because I do not have this will for progress." When one does not progress, one feels bored, everyone, young or old; for we are here on earth to progress. How tedious life would be without progress!

Life is monotonous. Most often it is not fun. It is far from being beautiful. But if you take it as a field for progress, then everything changes, everything becomes interesting and there is no longer any room for

boredom. Next time your teacher seems boring to you, instead of wasting your time doing nothing, try to understand why he bores you. Then if you have a capacity of observation and if you make an effort to understand, you will soon see that a kind of miracle has occurred and that you are no longer feeling bored at all.

This remedy is good in almost every case. Sometimes, in certain circumstances, everything seems dull, boring, stupid; this means that you are as boring as the circumstances and it clearly shows that you are not in a state of progress. It is simply a passing wave of boredom, and nothing is more contrary to the purpose of existence. At such a moment you might make an effort and ask yourself, "This boredom shows that I have something to learn, some progress to make in myself, some inertia to conquer, some weakness to overcome." Boredom is a dullness of the consciousness; and if you seek the cure within yourself, you will see that it immediately dissolves. Most people, when they feel bored, instead of making an effort to rise one step higher in their consciousness, come down one step lower; they come down even lower than they were before and do stupid things, they make themselves vulgar in the hope of amusing themselves. That is why men intoxicate themselves, spoil their health, deaden their brains. If they had risen instead of falling, they would have made use of this opportunity to progress.

In fact, the same thing holds true in all circumstances, when life gives you a severe blow, one of those blows which men call a misfortune. The first

thing they try to do is to forget, as if they did not forget only too soon! And in order to forget, they do all kinds of things. When something is very painful, they try to distract themselves — what they call distracting themselves, that is, doing stupid things, lowering their consciousness instead of raising it. If something extremely painful happens to you, never try to deaden yourself; you must not forget, you must not sink into unconsciousness.

Go right to the heart of the pain and there you will find the light, the truth, the strength and the joy which are hidden behind this pain. But for that you must be firm and refuse to let yourself slide.

In this way every event in life, great or small, can be an opportunity for progress. Even the most insignificant details can lead to revelations if you know how to profit from them. Whenever you are engaged in something which does not demand the whole of your attention, use it as an opportunity to develop your faculty of observation and you will see that you will make interesting discoveries. To help you to understand what I mean, I shall give you two examples. They are two brief moments in life which are insignificant in themselves, but still leave a deep and lasting impression.

The first example takes place in Paris. You have to go out into this immense city; here all is noise, apparent confusion, bewildering activity. Suddenly you see a woman walking in front of you; she is like most other women, her dress has nothing striking about it, but her gait is

remarkable, supple, rhythmic, elegant, harmonious. It catches your attention and you are full of wonder. Then, this body moving along so gracefully reminds you of all the splendours of ancient Greece and the unparalleled lesson in beauty which its culture gave to the whole world, and you live an unforgettable moment — all that just because of a woman who knows how to walk!

The second example is from the other end of the world, from Japan. You have just arrived in this beautiful country for a long stay and very soon you find out that unless you have at least a minimum knowledge of the language, it will be very difficult for you to get along. So you begin to study Japanese and in order to become familiar with the language you do not miss a single opportunity to hear people talking, you listen to them carefully, you try to understand what they are saying; and then, beside you, in a tram where you have just taken your seat, there is a small child of four or five years with his mother. The child begins to talk in a clear and pure voice and listening to him you have the remarkable experience that he knows spontaneously what you have to learn with so much effort, and that as far as Japanese is concerned he could be your teacher in spite of his youth.

In this way life becomes full of wonder and gives you a lesson at each step. Looked at from this angle, it is truly worth living.

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# The National Value of Art

Sri Aurobindo

THE ACTIVITY of human thought divides itself broadly into two groups of functions, those of the right hand, contemplation, creation, imagination, the centres that see the truth, and those of the left hand, criticism, reasoning, discrimination, inquiry, the centres that judge the truth when it is seen. In education the latter are fostered by scientific and manual training, but the only quality of the right hand that this education fosters is observation.

For this reason a purely scientific education tends to make thought keen and clear-sighted within certain limits, but narrow, hard and cold. Even in his own sphere the man without any training of the right hand can only progress in a settled groove; he cannot broaden the base of human culture or enlarge the bounds of science. Tennyson describes him as an eye well practised in Nature, a spirit bounded and poor, and the description is just. But a cultivated eye without a cultivated spirit makes by no means the highest type of man. It is precisely the cultivation of the spirit that is the object of what is well called a liberal education, and the pursuits best calculated to cultivate the growth of the spirit are language, literature, the Arts, music, painting, sculpture or the study of these, philosophy, religion, history, the study and understanding of man through his works and of Nature and man through the interpretative as well as through the analytic faculties.

These are the pursuits which belong to the intellectual activities of the right hand, and while the importance of most of these will be acknowledged, there is a tendency to ignore Art and poetry as mere refinements, luxuries of the rich and leisurely rather than things that are necessary to the mass of men or useful to life. This is largely due to the misuse of these great instruments by the luxurious few who held the world and its good things in their hands in the intermediate period of human progress. But the aesthetic faculties entering into the enjoyment of the world and the satisfaction of the vital instincts, the love of the beautiful in men and women, in food, in things, in articles of use and articles of pleasure, have done more than anything else to raise man from the beast, to refine and purge his passions, to ennoble his emotions and to lead him up through the heart and the imagination to the state of the intellectual man.

That which has helped man upward, must be preserved in order that he may not sink below the level he has attained. For man intellectually developed, mighty in scientific knowledge and the mastery of gross and subtle nature, using the elements as his servants and the world as his footstool, but undeveloped in heart and spirit, becomes only an inferior kind of Asura using the powers of a demigod to satisfy the nature of an animal.

According to dim traditions and memories of the old world, of such a

nature was the civilisation of old Atlantis, submerged beneath the Ocean when its greatness and its wickedness became too heavy a load for the earth to bear, and our own legends of the Asuras represent a similar consciousness of a great but abortive development in humanity.

The first and lowest use of Art is the purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual.

By speaking of the aesthetic use as the lowest, we do not wish to imply that it is not of immense value to humanity, but simply to assign to it its comparative value in relation to the higher uses. The aesthetic is of immense importance and until it has done its work, mankind is not really fitted to make full use of Art on the higher planes of human development. Aristotle assigns a high value to tragedy because of its purifying force. He describes its effect as katharsis, a sacramental word of the Greek mysteries, which, in the secret discipline of the ancient Greek Tantrics, answered precisely to our cittasuddhi ', the purification of the citta or mass of established ideas, feelings and actional habits in a man either by samyama ', rejection, or by bhoga, satisfaction, or by both. Aristotle was speaking of the purification of feelings, passions and emotions in the heart through imaginative treatment in poetry but the truth the idea contains is of much wider application and constitutes the justification of the aesthetic side of art. **It purifies by beauty.** The beautiful and the good are held by many thinkers to be the same and, though the idea may be wrongly stated, it is, when put from the right

standpoint, not only a truth but the fundamental truth of existence.

According to our own philosophy the whole world came out of ananda and returns into ananda, and the triple term in which ananda may be stated is Joy, Love, Beauty.

To see divine beauty in the whole world, man, life, nature, to love that which we have seen and to have pure unalloyed bliss in that love and that beauty is the appointed road by which mankind as a race must climb to God.

That is the reaching to vidya through avidya, to the One Pure and Divine through the manifold manifestation of Him, of which the Upanishad repeatedly speaks. But the bliss must be pure and unalloyed, unalloyed by self-regarding emotions, unalloyed by pain and evil.

The sense of good and bad, beautiful and unbeautiful, which afflicts our understanding and our senses, must be replaced by *akhandarasa*, undifferentiated and unabridged delight in the delightfulness of things, before the highest can be reached.

On the way to this goal full use must be made of the lower and abridged sense of beauty which seeks to replace the less beautiful by the more, the lower by the higher, the mean by the noble.

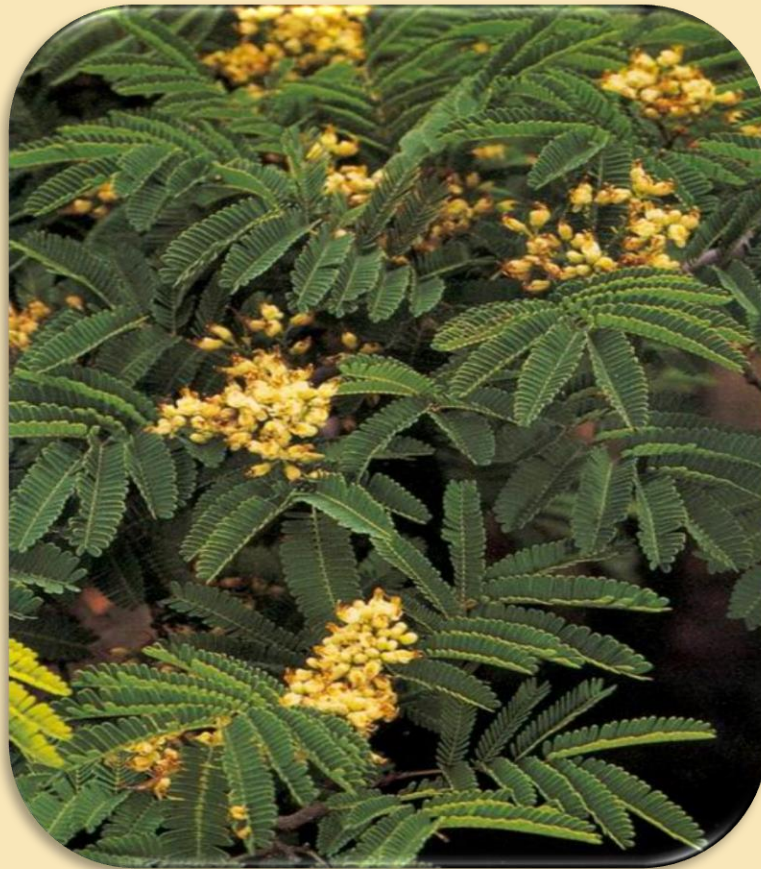
At a certain stage of human development the aesthetic sense is of infinite value in this direction. It raises and purifies conduct by instilling a distaste for the coarse desires and passions of the savage, for the rough, uncouth and excessive in action and manner, and restraining both feeling and action by a striving after the decent, the beautiful, the fit and seemly which received its highest expression in the manners of cultivated European society, the elaborate ceremonious life of the Confucian, the careful *acara* and etiquette of Hinduism.

At the present stage of progress this element is losing much of its once all-important value and, when overstressed, tends to hamper a higher development by the obstruction of soulless ceremony and formalism. Its great use was to discipline the savage animal instincts of the body, the vital instincts and the lower feelings in the heart.

Its disadvantage to progress is that it tends to trammel the play both of the higher feelings of the heart and the workings of originality in thought.

Born originally of a seeking after beauty, it degenerates into an attachment to form, to exterior uniformity, to precedent, to dead authority. In the future development of humanity it must be given a much lower place than in the past. Its limits must be recognised and the demands of a higher truth, sincerity and freedom of thought and feeling must be given priority. Mankind is apt to bind itself by attachment to the means of its past progress forgetful of the aim. The bondage to formulas

has to be outgrown, and in this again it is the sense of a higher beauty and fitness which will be most powerful to correct the lower. The art of life must be understood in more magnificent terms and must subordinate its more formal elements to the service of the master civilisers, Love and Thought. (2)



## Acknowledgements



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1. The Mother. CWM 12, 72-76
2. Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 1, 438-41

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