

The Sunlit Path



Sri Aurobindo Chair of Integral Studies

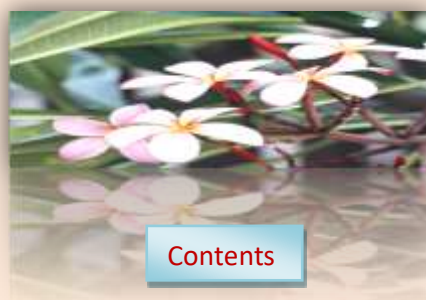
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Editorial

My dear friends,

I am happy to bring to you a special issue on the occasion of Teachers' Day. It contains several very special and enlightening articles on the deeper philosophy, content and context of education.

I do hope you will find the contents interesting and inspiring.

Sincere regards,

Dr Bhalendu Vaishnav

Measuring Rod of Ignorance Sri Aurobindo

For knowledge comes not to us as a guest
Called into our chamber from the outer world;
A friend and inmate of our secret self,
It hid behind our minds and fell asleep
And slowly wakes beneath the blows of life;
The mighty daemon lies unshaped within,
To evoke, to give it form is Nature's task.
All was a chaos of the true and false,
Mind sought amid deep mists of Nescience;
It looked within itself but saw not God.
A material interim diplomacy
Denied the Truth that transient truths might live
And hid the Deity in creed and guess
That the World-Ignorance might grow slowly wise.
This was the imbroglio made by sovereign Mind
Looking from a gleam-ridge into the Night
In her first tamperings with Inconscience:
Its alien dusk baffles her luminous eyes;
Her rapid hands must learn a cautious zeal;
Only a slow advance the earth can bear.

Yet was her strength unlike the unseeing earth's
Compelled to handle makeshift instruments
Invented by the life-force and the flesh.
Earth all perceives through doubtful images,
All she conceives in hazardous jets of sight,
Small lights kindled by touches of groping thought.
Incapable of the soul's direct inlook
She sees by spasms and solders knowledge-scrap,
Makes Truth the slave-girl of her indigence,
Expelling Nature's mystic unity
Cuts into quantum and mass the moving All;
She takes for measuring-rod her ignorance.

(1)



Knowledge

Sri Aurobindo

Always in this sense of a supreme self-knowledge is this word *jnana* used in Indian philosophy and Yoga; it is the light by which we grow into our true being, not the knowledge by which we increase our information and our intellectual riches; it is not scientific or psychological or philosophic or ethical or aesthetic or worldly and practical knowledge. These too no doubt help us to grow, but only in the becoming, not in the being; they enter into the definition of Yogic knowledge only when we use them as aids to know the Supreme, the Self, the Divine,—scientific knowledge, when we can get through the veil of processes and phenomena and see the one Reality behind which explains them all; psychological knowledge, when we use it to know ourselves and to distinguish the lower from the higher, so that this we may renounce and into that we may grow; philosophical knowledge, when we turn it as a light upon the essential principles of existence so as to discover and live in that which is eternal; ethical knowledge, when by it having distinguished sin from virtue we put away the one and rise above the other into the pure innocence of the divine Nature; aesthetic knowledge, when we discover by it the beauty of the Divine; knowledge of the world, when we see through it the way of the Lord with his creatures and use it for the service of the Divine in man. Even then they are only aids; the real knowledge is that which is a secret to the mind, of which the mind only gets reflections, but which lives in the spirit.

The Gita in describing how we come by this knowledge, says that we get first initiation into it from the men of knowledge who have *seen*, not those who know merely by the intellect, its essential truths; but the actuality of it comes from within ourselves: “the man who is perfected by Yoga, finds it of himself in the self by the course of Time,”

it grows within him, that is to say, and he grows into it as he goes on increasing in desirelessness, in equality, in devotion to the Divine. It is only of the supreme knowledge that this can altogether be said; the knowledge which the intellect of man amasses, is gathered laboriously by the senses and the reason from outside. To get this other knowledge, self-existent, intuitive, self-experiencing, self-revealing, we must have conquered and controlled our mind and senses, *sam' yatendriyah.*, so that we are no longer subject to their delusions, but rather the mind and senses become its pure mirror; we must have fixed our whole conscious being on the truth of that supreme reality in which all exists, *tat-parah.*, so that it may display in us its luminous self-existence.

Finally, we must have a faith which no intellectual doubt can be allowed to disturb, *sraddhavan labhate jn anam.* “The ignorant who has not faith, the soul of doubt goeth to perdition; neither this world, nor the supreme world, nor any happiness is for the soul full of doubts.” In fact, it is true that without faith nothing decisive can be achieved either in this world or for possession of the world above, and that it is only by laying hold of some sure basis and positive support that man can attain any measure of terrestrial or celestial success and satisfaction and happiness; the merely sceptical mind loses itself in the void. But still in the lower knowledge doubt and scepticism have their temporary uses; in the higher they are stumbling-blocks: for there the whole secret is not the balancing of truth and error, but a constantly progressing realisation of revealed truth. In intellectual knowledge there is always a mixture of falsehood or incompleteness which has to be got rid of by subjecting the truth itself to sceptical inquiry; but in the higher knowledge falsehood cannot enter and that which intellect contributes by attaching itself to this or that opinion, cannot be got rid of by mere questioning, but will fall away of itself by persistence in realisation. Whatever incompleteness there is in the knowledge attained, it must be got rid of, not by questioning in its roots what has

already been realised, but by proceeding to further and more complete realisation through a deeper, higher and wider living in the Spirit. And what is not yet realised must be prepared for by faith, not by sceptical questioning, because this truth is one which the intellect cannot give and which is indeed often quite opposed to the ideas in which the reasoning and logical mind gets entangled: it is not a truth which has to be proved, but a truth which has to be lived inwardly, a greater reality into which we have to grow. Finally, it is in itself a self-existent truth and would be self-evident if it were not for the sorceries of the ignorance in which we live; the doubts, the perplexities which prevent us from accepting and following it, arise from that ignorance, from the sense-bewildered, opinion-perplexed heart and mind, living as they do in a lower and phenomenal truth and therefore questioning the higher realities, *ajn ana-sambhu tam hrtstham' sam' sayam*. They have to be cut away by the sword of knowledge, says the Gita, by the knowledge that realises, by resorting constantly to Yoga, that is, by living out the union with the Supreme whose truth being known all is known, ***yasmin vijñate sarvam' vijñatam***. (2)



To Think With Ideas

The Mother

You have asked the teachers “to think with ideas instead of with words”. You have also said that later on you will ask them to think with experiences. Will you throw some light on these three ways of thinking?

Our house has a very high tower; at the very top of that tower there is a bright and bare room, the last one before we emerge into the open air, into the full light.

Sometimes, when we are at leisure to do so, we climb up to this bright room, and there, if we remain very quiet, one or more visitors call on us; some are tall, others small, some single, others in groups; all are bright and graceful.

Usually, in our joy at their arrival and in our haste to receive them well, we lose our tranquillity and come galloping down to rush into the large hall which forms the base of the tower and which is the store-room of words. Here, more or less excited, we select, reject, assemble, combine, disarrange, rearrange all the words within our reach in an attempt to transcribe this or that visitor who has come to us. But most often the picture we succeed in making of her is more like a caricature than a portrait.

And yet if we were wiser, we would remain up there at the summit of the tower, quite still, in joyful contemplation. Then, after a certain length of time, we would see the visitors themselves descending slowly, gracefully, calmly, without losing anything of their elegance or their beauty and, as they cross the store-room of words, clothing

themselves effortlessly, automatically, with the words needed to make them perceptible even in the material house.

This is what I call thinking with ideas.

When this process is no longer mysterious to you, I shall explain what is meant by thinking with experiences.

31 May 1960

(3)



The Several Lights

Nolini Kanta gupta

The Brihadaranyaka speaks of several lights that man possesses, one in the absence of another, for his illumination and guidance.

First of all, he has the Sun; it is the primary light by which he lives and moves. When the Sun sets, the Moon rises to replace it. When both the Sun and the Moon set, he has recourse to the Fire. And when the Fire, too, is extinguished, there comes the Word. In the end, when the Fire is quieted and the Word silenced, man is lighted by the Light of the Atman. This Atman is all-Knowledge, it is secreted within the life, within the heart: it is self-luminous – vijnanamayah pranesu hrdayantarjyotih.

The progression indicated by the order of succession points to a gradual withdrawal from the outer to the inner light, from the surface to the deep, from the obvious to the secret, from the actual and derivative to the real and original. We begin by the senses and move towards the Spirit.

The Sun is the first and the most immediate source of light that man has and needs. He is the presiding deity of our waking consciousness and has his seat in the eye – caksusah adityah, adityah caksuh bhutva aksini pravisat. The eye is the representative of the senses; it is the sense par excellence. In truth sense-perception is the initial light with which we have to guide us it is the light with which we start on the way. A developed stage comes when the Sun sets for us, that is to say, when we retire from the senses and rise into the mind, whose divinity is the Moon. It is the mental knowledge, the light of reason and intelligence, of reflection and imagination that govern our

consciousness. We have to proceed farther and get beyond the mind, exceed the derivative light of the Moon. So when the Moon sets, the Fire is kindled. It is the light of the ardent and aspiring heart, the glow of an inner urge, the instincts and inspirations of our secret life-will. Here we come into touch with a source of knowledge and realization, a guidance more direct than the mind and much deeper than the sense=perception. Still this light partakes more of heat than of pure luminosity; it is one may say, incandescent feeling, but not vision. We must probe deeper, mount higher-reach heights and profundities that are scene and transparent. The fire is to be quieted and silenced, says the Upanished. Then we come nearer, to the immediate vicinity of the Truth: an inner hearing opens, the direct voice of Truth-the Word-reaches us to lead and guide. Even so, however, we have not come to the end of our journey; the word of revelation is not the ultimate Light. The Word too is a clothing, though a luminous clothing – hiranmayam patram. When this last veil dissolves and disappears, when utter silence, absolute calm and quietude reign in the entire consciousness, when no other lights trouble or distract our attention, there appears the Atman in its own body; we stand face to face with the source of all lights, the self of the Light, the light of the self We are that Light and sw become that Light.

(4)



The Good Teacher and The Good Pupil

Kireet Joshi

For the last two hundred years or more there has been a growing realization that the teacher should be child-centred and should help the child's innate potential to blossom fully. Learner-centred teaching is being advanced in progressive schools all over the world.

Indeed, if we examine the examples of good teachers of the past or of the present, we shall find that they have always been learner-oriented: and good pupils have blossomed like lovely flowers when tended with care, love and understanding or even when left to themselves with interventions from teachers when necessary.

A good teacher is always a help in the pupil's pursuit of accomplishment and perfection. For the pupil, the important things are his own enthusiasm and personal effort that can sustain patient and persistent work towards growth and progress. The teacher comes in to *uplift* the pupil's effort, his growing knowledge, his skills, his orientation. When a good teacher and a good pupil come together, astonishing results follow for both of them — and under ideal conditions incredible transmutations of the personality and its power take place, as we can witness in some of the selections in this book.

Instruction, example and influence are the three instruments of a good teacher. A good teacher does not instruct merely by words. In fact, he makes a sparing use of them. He utilizes his communicative skills to invent illuminating phrases and expressions, to initiate meaningful devices and projects, and to create a stimulating atmosphere and environment.

The art of instruction is extremely subtle and delicate, but a good teacher practises this art effortlessly. He harmoniously blends formal with informal instruction. He varies his methods according to circumstances and organizes his teaching to suit the varying demands and needs of his

pupils. A good teacher is a keen observer and tries to understand each of his pupils by a kind of identity. He strives untiringly to make his programmes or lessons interesting and to awaken in his pupils a power of concentration and an irresistible will for progress. Finally, he instructs even without instructing, and allows his inner mastery of his own knowledge to shine out through actions rather than through words.

A good teacher knows that example is more important than instruction, and he strives not only to keep his ideals in front of him, but also to progressively embody them. He is scrupulously scientific in detecting his own errors and defects, knowing very well that he cannot demand from his students what he himself cannot practise. The example expected from the teacher is not merely his outward behaviour, but his inner life, his aims and the sincerity with which he pursues those aims.

It is sometimes argued that what should be expected from the teacher is professional competence and a power of communication, and nothing more. But this contention ignores the fact that the example set by the teacher's inner and outer life is automatically communicated to the pupils, whether this is intended or not. Giving a good example is an inherent part of the teacher's task.

But this is not all. **Even more powerful than example is the direct influence the teacher exercises upon his students.** Influence is the power of contact and the nearness of the teacher's presence. Knowingly or unknowingly, teachers tend to exercise authority over their students, and sometimes this authority smacks of arrogance. Not infrequently, the act of teaching itself becomes a battery of suggestions of more or less hypnotic intensity. A good teacher must be intent upon cultivating healthy attitudes and traits which have salutary effects on students.

A good teacher accepts his work as a trust given to him by his station and its duties. He recognizes his own importance while acknowledging its relativity. He suggests but does not impose, he is a friend and a

philosopher and guide; he does not arrogate to himself vain masterhood. Inspired by humility, he looks upon himself as a child leading children.

A good teacher is a constant learner. He not only renews his knowledge in the field of his specialization, but he also continues to enrich his personality and strives to achieve deeper and higher realizations. Even as he rises higher and higher, he feels a greater and greater need to share his knowledge, skill, experience and illumination with others, particularly with younger generations. In doing so, he may encounter resistance and conflict.

Let us now turn to the pupil.

Every child has an inner desire to learn and to grow, but the most important characteristic of the good pupil is his zeal or enthusiasm. This zeal is what determines the persistence of his effort, and such persistence is indispensable to achieve higher and higher levels of excellence. A good pupil is a seeker of knowledge and, motivated by curiosity and a growing sense of wonder, seeks knowledge for its own sake. He travels from the known to the unknown, and in this travel does not limit himself to thought and imagination alone, but sets out to come in direct contact with Nature and Man, in order to gain access to wider, deeper and higher realms of experience.

A good pupil tends to organize his life and to find time for as many activities as possible. In due course, he discovers that concentration holds the key to development, and that he can compress a long programme of work into a much shorter period by applying the art and science of concentration to it. In his natural process of flowering, he comes to combine work and play, and whether in his more formal studies or in the fine arts and crafts, he aims at cultivating and refining his actual and potential faculties.

A good pupil realizes that both body and mind should be developed vigorously and rigorously. He discovers that the qualities needed in

physical education contribute a great deal to the development of an integrated personality. For example, the sporting spirit, valued most in physical education, includes good humour and tolerance and consideration for all, a right attitude and friendliness to both teammates and rivals, self-control and a scrupulous observance of the laws of the game, fair play, an equal acceptance of victory or defeat without bad humour, resentment or ill-will towards successful competitors, and the loyal acceptance of the decisions of the appointed judge, umpire or referee. These qualities have their value for life in general and the help that sports can give to an integral development is direct and invaluable.

One of the best lessons of the sporting spirit is that one should strive not to stand first but to do one's best. And a good pupil should put this lesson into practice in every domain of activity.

In the realm of studies, a good pupil tries to develop different aspects of his mind. The search for truth in a scientific and philosophic spirit is his basic motivation, and he seeks to develop a right discrimination between appearance and reality. He loves books but is not a bookworm. He may or may not read voraciously — his main concern is to cultivate subtlety of intelligence and the capacity to develop complex systems of thought. He learns the skills of analysis and strives to master the dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

A harmonious development of the rational mind, the ethical sense and the aesthetic sensibility is the highest aim of normal manhood, and a good pupil strives to integrate the triple powers of reason, will and imagination in harmony with his own unique turn of temperament and the natural law of his inner growth. Indeed, he avoids a hotch-potch of activities but rather seeks to organize them into a kind of unity emerging from the inner core of his soul's integral aspiration.

At an important stage of the pupil's life there comes a choice, and the quality of the pupil will be judged by and will depend upon the choice he makes. This is the choice between the good and the

pleasant, *shreyas* and *preyas*, to use the terms of the Katha Upanishad. Not that pleasure or enjoyment has no place in an ideal life, but there is a distinction between seeking pleasure for the sake of pleasure and taking pleasure in whatever worthwhile action one does or undertakes to do. A good pupil makes this distinction and finds that, not in seeking pleasure, but in seeking good and finding pleasure in it, lies the secret of self-discipline. Indeed this is also the secret of the integrated personality. The choice between the good and the pleasant is not merely a matter of ethical life; it is, in a sense, a matter that pervades all aspects of life and in all circumstances the pupil is confronted with this choice. He can sustain this continuous encounter with choice only if he has in him that sublimest of qualities, *sincerity*. **Indeed, it can be said that sincerity is the golden key to continuous and integral learning.** And no pupil can continue to remain a good pupil unless he has an ever-fresh sincerity which grows continuously and so becomes a burning fire of integral sincerity, that is, sincerity in all parts of the being.

It is this burning fire of sincerity that imparts to the pupil the right thrust and direction, as well as that concentrated and tranquil state of consciousness required to *experience* the reality which is the object of all knowledge. And it is this burning fire that breaks the limitations of the human mind and leads the seeker into higher domains of psychic and spiritual experience. A good pupil does not refuse to transgress the normal limitations of consciousness, but has the requisite courage to take the staff in his hands and set out on a new journey. For a good pupil is not deterred by dogmatism. He is free to test on the anvil of reason and experience all affirmations and all negations. Henceforth, he is no more a seeker of shadows, appearances, names or forms, but a seeker of the real, the boundless, the infinite.

The journey of the good pupil is difficult and there are tests on the way that he must pass in order to enter new gates of progress. In this journey, sooner rather than later, he comes to learn how to learn, and he employs the principles of learning to educate himself. Sooner rather than

later, he comes to learn how to control himself, and he employs the principles of discipline to achieve self-possession and self-mastery. Sooner rather than later, he comes to know his own nature, his psychological make-up, his inclinations, his own strengths and weaknesses, and he employs the principles of self-enlargement to discover his wider self, and ultimately his highest unegoistic psychic and spiritual self, and the means by which the light and power of the self can be made manifest in the physical world.

But, like any pupil, the good pupil too needs help and guidance from the teacher. The distinguishing mark of a good pupil is the attitude with which he seeks help and the degree and quality of the help he seeks. Since he puts in a good deal of personal effort, he does not demand much of the teacher's time. Yet, since his eagerness to learn is great, he learns faster, and this demands greater attention and time from the teacher. There are seasons of learning when a pupil can need and demand almost exclusive attention. There are instances when a good pupil needs very little help from the teacher and at a certain stage can dispense with it. Frequently this happens when the pupil has found within himself the teacher's living guidance or when he has learned the art of discovering the inner teacher in every circumstance and in every encounter. It may be said that the need for external help diminishes as the pupil advances in the discovery of the inner teacher, or when the inner relationship between the pupil and the teacher is so intimate and intense that the pupil constantly feels an ever increasing and more joyful inner contact with him.

In a sense, the relationship between a good pupil and a good teacher is indescribable. It tends to be profound and irrevocable, and the pupil feels a natural urge to emulate and obey his teacher. The tradition in which the pupil is enjoined to obey the teacher unquestioningly is rooted in the natural sacredness of the living relationship between the good pupil and the good teacher, and this tradition has its uses. But we find that a good teacher appreciates repeated questioning by the pupil, and he even allows a mutual testing.

To foster an increasing number of good teachers and good pupils is a special responsibility of any educational system and of those in charge of designing that system. It is true that good teachers and good pupils have flourished even in the most deficient circumstances, but it is certain that they would have proved to be better teachers and better pupils had the system of education itself been better; and it is also certain that a good system of education tends to promote the rapid multiplication of good teachers and good pupils.

Today, educational systems almost everywhere are utilitarian in character, promoting an examination-oriented education that imprisons teachers and students alike. Their goals are limited and have no intrinsic relationship with the ideal processes and ends of genuine teaching-learning. This point is very well illustrated in some of the passages included here.

Do we have any idea as to what system of education would encourage the flowering of good teachers and good pupils? This is a difficult question to answer. But if we study various innovative experiments conducted in this context, it seems that an ideal system is yet to be invented and can come about only if three things are assured. First, there must be a great change in the lecture system. Lectures should have a much more modest place than they have today. A greater role should be assigned to self-learning and to work on individual and collective projects. Second, the present syllabus system must undergo a major modification. Programmes of study should be much more flexible. Pupils and teachers should have the possibility of changing the programmes according to the pupils' evolving needs. In fact, syllabi should be evolutionary in character, developing and emerging out of the interests of the pupils and their goals. Finally, the examination system must be thoroughly revised. Tests should be designed to stimulate the pupils to make further progress. They should be impromptu and should vary according to the varying situations of individuals and groups.

An ideal system of education would provide an environment and a framework that facilitates a harmonious blending of freedom and discipline. This harmonious blending presupposes, mainly on the part of teachers and educational administrators, the fulfillment of two conditions: the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of harmony. Neither of these pursuits can be meaningful or fruitful unless they are voluntary. The spirit of liberty is a necessary condition for the search for truth and for securing cooperation, mutual goodwill and fellow feeling. In brief, it may be said that Truth, Harmony and Liberty will be the underlying principles of an ideal system of education.

At the same time, it must be admitted that without good teachers and good pupils there can be no good educational system. Today's educators, therefore, need to work on all three fronts simultaneously: the teacher, the pupil and the system. But where should we begin? This, again, is not an easy question to answer. Probably we should begin from where we are — that is, if we are teachers, we should strive to become good teachers; if we are pupils, we should strive to become good pupils; and if we are in charge of the educational system, we should set about creating new conditions in the system so as to encourage and foster good teachers and good pupils.

(5)





Acknowledgements

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1. Sri Aurobindo, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, CWSA, 33,244
2. Sri Aurobindo, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, CWSA, 19;203-5
3. The Mother, Collected Works of The Mother, CWM, 12; CWM, 12; 185-86
4. Nolini Kanta Gupta, Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol.2, 14-15, Copyright: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1971
5. Kireet Joshi, The Good Teacher and The Good Pupil; 15-23 Copyright: Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 1988

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