

Evolution and the Earth

by Rod Hemsell

An exploration of the relationship between Integral Yoga and
Sustainability –
environmental, socio-economic, and cultural

Texts – *The Life Divine*, Ch. 28
Savitri, Bk. 1, Canto 3; Bk. 11, Canto 1

A Presentation of the University of Human Unity in Auroville

Part I Framing the Problem: Yoga and Sustainability

When this topic was suggested I was quite fascinated by it because we have been pursuing the philosophy of evolution for a couple of years, and also searching for an understanding of the integral paradigm, which implies that all levels of consciousness and manifestation can be known integrally. That implies that there should be an approach to understanding which is integral. Between these two topics – the philosophy of evolution and the integral paradigm – it seemed that this would be an opportunity to look more closely at the relationship between Yoga and Sustainability. Of course my approach to this exploration is philosophical; I want to use a philosophical approach, which means to use words and ideas to put us in front of certain realities, which ultimately means to move away from ideas by using ideas philosophically. That's one of the best ways for human beings to guide their consciousness, I think.

I'm going to do this in three stages: first I want to try to frame the problem; in the second stage I want to focus on a text of Sri Aurobindo which defines the problem and the yogic solution; in the third stage we hope to come to a higher level of spiritual understanding of what this yogic solution means, what the yoga of transformation means. If we come to this understanding, the reality of what this means, it will incorporate all of the previous stages of thought we have gone through and it will put the problem in the highest possible perspective. Normally when we consider the problem of sustainability, we are not considering it in the highest possible perspective. We are normally thinking about practical solutions to immediate problems. In this sense, yoga and sustainability are pretty much opposite poles. The transformation of consciousness is a very interior

pursuit. The achievement of socio-economic and environmental sustainability is a very practical, external pursuit. At the same time, they are complementaries; not merely opposites.

This is an understanding that we can derive from Sri Aurobindo because what is unique about Sri Aurobindo, absolutely unique, is that for him evolution and the earth are the spiritual reality. There is absolutely no separation, for him, between evolution, the earth, and consciousness. Spiritual experience is a product of matter and life and mind and spiritual energy (shakti); it is a product of the evolution of consciousness from physical to vital to mental structures which has finally made it possible to understand something about the true nature of existence. Squirrels don't need to know about the nature of existence, but they do need to know how to build their houses. But human beings have come to the point where we are able, and in fact driven, to understand what's behind the organization of matter that eventually enables it to produce life; and what's behind that matter-life complex that enables different species to learn to fill the niches that they fill, and to maintain those niches on the earth, so that eventually the human being arrives at a level of consciousness that is aware of all of these principles and processes. For Sri Aurobindo, that evolution of consciousness is the earth; the earth is the container of that evolutionary process, and spirituality is not anything else than the perception of that unity of energy, and the continuity of development, and the meaningfulness of Nature.

The Darwinians today have all recognized that Nature is a goddess, and she makes no mistakes; she always solves her problems. The conventional understanding about that today is that the complex of Nature is made up of material principles, life principles, and mind principles. Sixty years ago that was not the conventional understanding. But Sri Aurobindo predicted in 1920 that science would come to that understanding: that these three levels of energy and organization are all levels of the same world energy or Nature; now that is conventionally accepted.¹

For Sri Aurobindo, the ability of the Divine Shakti to be experienced, to make itself known, – not just to unconceal itself in the form of the squirrel's ability to build houses, but to make itself known as a universal divine force which we can perceive – it has brought evolution from the complete inconscience of matter up to this level of organization so that it can express itself consciously and we can be conscious of it expressing itself. It is a continuum: at that point consciousness and force, inner and outer are one. When we perceive the divine shakti it is in a physical-vital-mental context using all of those structures to reveal itself. Then Sri Aurobindo can say that because it is that, it is not some otherworldly thing. In the past people who have had this level of resonance with the divine shakti could only see the possibility of disappearing into its infinite bliss; but its aim is to eventually roll that infinite bliss back into the structures and divinize the structures. The divine is in all of the structures, expressing itself through other levels of consciousness, but at some point it becomes capable of expressing itself as itself in forms,

¹ See Lorenz (1977), Dawkins (1982), Capra (1996,2002), Lakoff and Johnson (1999), Jablonka and Lamb (2005), etc.

forms of beauty and power and harmony and delight. This seems to be absolutely unique in the history of spiritual knowledge.

Now, we can sit here and try to contemplate that future, that divinely conscious, resonant, integral future, and it seems to be quite distant. We can conceive of it, and it's a happy thought. But when we are going through our daily routine we understand that we are not there yet. And it requires an effort just to remember the potential for that. It's called *sadhana*. Similarly, with respect to sustainability, we can contemplate all the problems on the earth that compromise our survival and the survival of other species, and we can contemplate solutions to those problems. For example, in 1992 at the Earth Summit, a document was signed by 167 nations, called the Biodiversity Treaty. Earth Day began in 1970, right? And so, twenty years later there was a global biodiversity conference and a treaty was signed, which said that 'all the nations should make concerted efforts, and combined efforts, to conserve biological diversity and to use biological resources in a sustainable manner.' (Now I am framing a problem.)

The Living Planet Report in 2006, fourteen years later, after thirty years of tracking biological diversity, reported that 30% of vertebrate species had become extinct since 1970. Now vertebrate species are our closest kin. We are not talking about worms and insects but about birds and fish and mammals. Along with that phenomenon mangrove forests are becoming extinct, and a lot of those life forms depend on mangrove forests; and the cause of all of that extinction is habitat disruption by human overpopulation. So we know that the rate of human population growth is unsustainable. We can see many signs of this and it has been known since before the Rio Summit. The first reports on overpopulation came out in the sixties, and on global warming in the eighties.

Human beings have become very conscious since the sixties of our connectedness on Planet Earth, and of the relationship between consciousness and force, of intention and expression; of the close relationship between what drives us from within and what the result is outside. And how this is universal – that all nature is participating from within to the outside and there is a feedback loop; learning is going on at every level of the organization of life on earth. Consciousness is there, omnipresent. All of its expressions and forms and structures are It, in its current manifestations. From that kind of understanding, as highly conscious beings – relatively speaking – we can understand that universal principles such as these: stability and change; unity and diversity, power and harmony... are opposites and at the same time they are complementaries. They are necessary to each other; there cannot be one without the other.

First Tier Principles (metaphysical)

- Stability and Change
- Unity and Diversity
- Power and Harmony
- Consciousness and Force
- Essence and Existence
- Soul and Nature
- Purusha (male) and Prakriti (female)
- Identity and Difference
- Mutuality and Competition

Even on the lowest level of the chart, mutuality and competition, in the science of evolution it is understood that there is not one without the other, there is always mutuality and competition going on in the same group of organisms. That which exists is always a pattern of expression of something which is itself a being, an essence. The human, for example, in all of its infinite expressions, is still essentially a human being distinct from all other beings, but it has infinite expressions of that which it is. And we only know what it is through its expressions: we know that the human being is a social creature capable of abstraction and logic, planning and ethical behavior, self-sacrifice that is very conscious, for the well-being of the group. Everyone of us practices this all the time; it is essential to our nature. It is ethical behavior – it's our essence. We can find many expressions of such social behavior in lower forms of the animal kingdom, which indicate actions for the well-being of the group, but it's not the essential, dominant feature of the being. It's present as an evolutionary development, which in us is the human being, the mental being.

So, one relationship I want to point out between sustainability and yoga, is that we can understand the problems that lead us to seek yoga and sustainability, the spiritual and material development of consciousness, but both of the end results we are envisioning are far away from us. In ordinary life, we can forget them both quite easily. We can behave as if we have never heard of either yoga or sustainability. It's still possible for us to do that. We do not exist in a divine consciousness of the oneness of unity and diversity, the oneness of soul and nature, and we are not expressing that oneness through sustainable living practices. So what do we do next, then? We start looking at another level of principle. We have to study the situation more closely. We have to learn to recognize and utilize information about how those higher principles work out on a more tangible empirical level.

Second Tier Principles (empirical)

- Structures and Functions
- Patterns and Processes
- Cells/Organisms and Metabolism/Work
- Species and Replication/Variation
- Societies and Customs/Rituals
- Rules (standards) and Norms (behavior)
- Economies and Classes/Sectors
- Languages and Idioms/Symbols/Expressions
- Values and Memes/Intentions

And here again we find that the principles in a way are opposites and in a way they are complementaries. We notice in nature, quite naturally, structures and functions. We can understand things in terms of structures and functions, we can observe and understand patterns and processes. We know that all species are involved in replicating themselves and in evolving variations of themselves throughout biological time. We know that all societies are made up of customs and rituals. We can identify them and see their similarities and differences. We can say that this society is expressed through these customs and rituals. We know them and identify the group by those expressions. That group values those expressions and intentionally maintains them. What at a lower level was an identifiable physical pattern and process, at a higher level is a value and intention.

And in this way of thinking, we come to have knowledge of ourselves and our environment, and our species, and the earth, and how to positively or negatively impact those existing realities. We utilize this way of knowing in order to maintain our systems. And to understand and impact other systems. And this brings us to Sri Aurobindo's understanding. In the late 1800s and early 1900s this way of understanding, this level of consciousness, was omnipresent in Western intellectual society, and Sri Aurobindo must have been inundated with knowledge of evolutionary theory, and it was easy for him to see the relationship between evolution and spirituality; he put the two together immediately. It hasn't been so easy for all evolutionists to do that, but *The Life Divine* is more about evolution than any other subject. There is hardly any discussion of scriptural knowledge in *The Life Divine*. There is some, but it is mostly about evolution of consciousness and always in the context of the evolution of life and body.

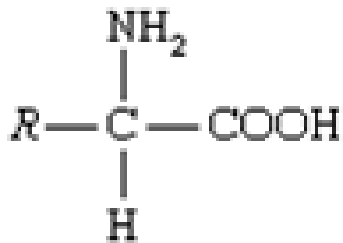
Now, it is important for us to note that he is continually pointing out, as did other philosophers during that period, that there is a fundamental fallacy in this way of knowing. When we have identified structures and functions, patterns and processes, organisms and their work, species and their survival, societies and their customs, values and intentions, we have acquired a mental understanding. We have framed something in our minds which corresponds to something in the world. It corresponds to a

consciousness-force, and to an essence and existence in the earth field. But when we frame that understanding, we then become preoccupied with what is in the frame and we lose touch with the actual, dynamic reality, with the integral expression; our mind becomes preoccupied with the mental *prakriti* and forgets about the soul. Even if it thinks about it, it doesn't try to contact it. It doesn't try to identify with the differences. It is satisfied with knowing the differences abstractly. That gives it a sense of understanding. We know how everything is related, and how everything is different from everything else. And we derive principles of unity and are happy with the derivation. But we are not really engaging the unity, experientially, dynamically. So there is a fallacy in this mental development that we have achieved. It is a higher level of consciousness and force than the others, but those principles and processes are actually there in all the levels; we have become preoccupied with our framing of them but we are not in touch with their actual unfolding in the world.

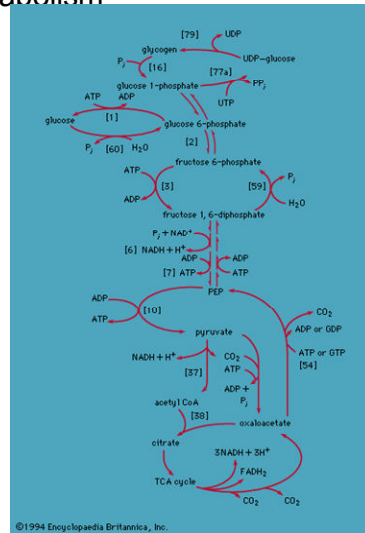
Therefore it is difficult for us to come to terms with radical concepts like the spiritualization of matter, and economically and environmentally sustainable living. They are not habits that we have yet. They are understandings that we have only acquired in the last fifty or sixty years, as a species. This understanding is now quite widespread, almost universal, but still the problems are there. (This is the more fundamental problem: the fallacy of abstract knowledge.)

Organic patterns and processes

- Amino acid



- Adenosine triphosphate - metabolism



Let's look more closely at some specific examples of this problem. We know that every living thing is made up of amino acids. This is a molecular structure. We also now know that carbon has a very high level of memory capacity, like silicon. That protein molecule of which genes and enzymes and cells are made, the amino acid molecule, has been evolving in cells for a few billion years. Not only is it a structure with a function – memory primarily – and self replication, but it is a pattern that we find throughout life. We are all connected by that molecule. And the adenosine triphosphate molecule, which we see in action in the diagram, is another structure in our cells that metabolizes phosphorous, in relation to the amino acid structures, and enables us to do all kinds of work, by reducing phosphorous and carrying messages through the nerve cells.

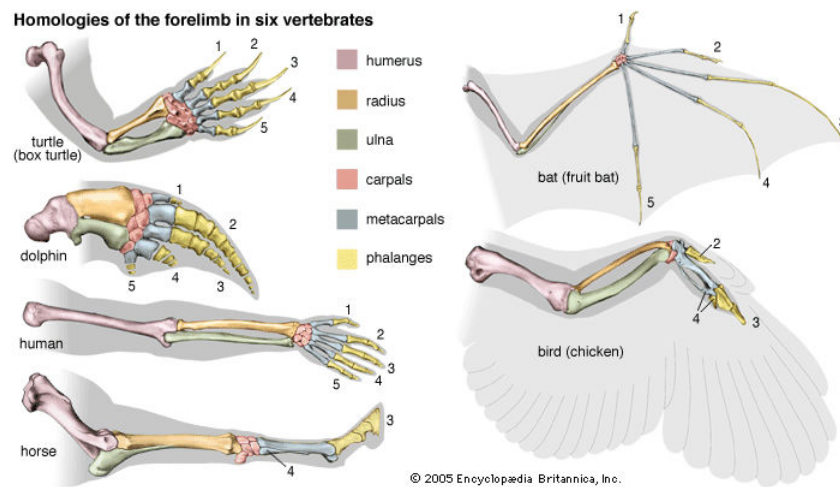
Periodically, in this process, a hydrogen atom is released, and carbon dioxide is released as waste; the hydrogen is a proton, a positive atom that releases light particles in the cells as part of the process of metabolism. When the squirrel builds its nest, or when I point to this diagram, this process of light formation is going on in all of my nerve cells and in the squirrel's nerve cells, and in all of us all of the time, enabling us to do what we do. We know also that if we practice yoga and slow down our external expressions, we are doing an action in ourselves which is sending electrical impulses throughout our body that is illumining our cells. Here, when we work and communicate, we are transferring information; in the embryo this process is producing organs at the right time and place to make the organism develop; after it is developed another kind of work is going on to enable growth and development; and then another kind of work goes on to learn to survive, reproduce and organize society. The knowledge that is contained in these material structures has been evolving for three billion years. What makes the structures patterns is that the atoms keep changing but the patterns and processes don't change. Each new atom of carbon or hydrogen or oxygen that enters the molecular structure does the same thing; there is a constant transfer of memory going on in the physical structures of life.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that in Sankhya philosophy this has been known forever: it is called *chitta*, the memory in the physical being on the molecular level. Nowadays, physicists know that carbon has a high memory potential but it is not as stable as silicon. If it could be stabilized it would be a better computer chip than silicon, and we are made of that! Physicists know today that carbon is earth nature; earth nature is memory, earth nature is consciousness. This is known today by physicists. And the idea of the cosmological anthropic principle is being written about by everybody. It says that conscious life is only possible because of the behavior of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen which can only exist as a result of a certain solar time; not only our solar system but the whole evolution of solar time in the universe which has enabled these atoms to be present on the earth. This is a cosmological understanding that physicists and biologists are fully conversant with these days, and it is also understood that consciousness is somehow inherent in matter and life.

It has also been understood since Darwin's day that the human being can influence the direction of evolution. Our evolutionary development is evidently more a product of the mind than of vital and physical processes. The mind is somehow in

control, and it is an evolutionary fact that the evolution of human consciousness is happening very rapidly, though it is not so obvious on the physical and vital level as on the mental level. If we look at human society in the past few thousand years, we see that enormous changes have taken place, and technology today is changing things on earth more rapidly than it was five hundred years ago, while that technology brought changes much faster than in the previous thousand years.

Organic structures and functions



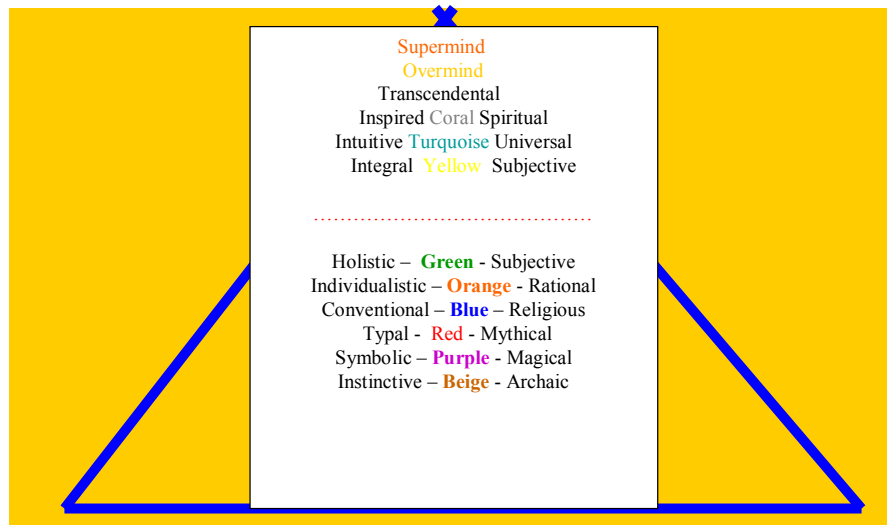
So we know about these structures – physical, biological, social - and that they are everywhere; and we know about these patterns and processes and functions of life and mind that we observe everywhere; we understand these things very well. We also know, in a similar way, that these patterns and processes have created other structures and functions on a higher level of organization across species. For example, there has been a gradual homologous development of the forelimbs of vertebrates, a similar development of structure and function found in many species. So the turtle, dolphin, human, bat and chicken have had a similar forelimb development (as shown above), along with all of the organs of perception (*manas*) shared by the animal kingdom. Science has studied, primarily, such structural evolution, and genetic evolution. More recently it has focused on behavioral evolution as well: molecular, structural, behavioral, and finally symbolic, conceptual evolution (*buddhi*), which enables us to recognize that the same processes, structures and functions are shared by all life. We conclude that this world that we inhabit

is made up of infinitely diverse yet unified patterns of body, life and mind. And each of those patterns is the expression of an entity, a being.

Similarly, we can look at societies and observe that all societies throughout history have expressed values, organizational structures, patterns of behavior, consciousness, intentions – in different and unique ways. ²

Social structures and value memes

- Evolution of society



For example, the typical, mythical society of Egypt, and the conventional religious society of the middle ages in Europe, which are closely related in many ways, share many patterns of social development that are similar, but there are strong unique differences. One was mythical and hierarchic to an extreme, the other, at the next level, is based more on common values, conventional values, with the hierarchic structure of the church behind. The values are now shared by the mass, whereas in Egypt only the top of the pyramid of society had knowledge and control. In conventional societies knowledge and responsibility become more diversified and diffuse. By the time the rational, individualistic society emerges around 15-1600, everyone is in charge. We still find governmental structures, agricultural processes, conventional values and hierarchies, but

² For a detailed discussion of this developmental paradigm see Spiral Dynamics 1&2, <univrsityofhumanunity.org>

the general behavior of this society is more characteristically rational, on a large scale, than were the Egyptian or the Christian of the middle ages in Europe.

We can understand from such observations that evolution is going on in human society. There are many patterns, processes, structures, functions, values and expressions that we can identify in any society we study. But does that put us in touch with the soul of a social group; do we realize by this kind of analysis that universal principles of power and harmony, which become opposites in society, are trying to evolve through the soul of a particular society, and that all of its expressions are unconsciously meant to harmonize and create powerful stable structures for the sake of these essential principles of power and harmony? Do we resonate with the spirit of a particular society and how it is uniquely expressing those intentions through its laws, its hierarchies, its agriculture and art? Probably not. We just study the surface patterns. We don't put ourselves in contact with the universal forces that are expressing themselves through those structures, or with the essential will that is embodied in them. We only think in terms of these dualities that give us a sense of knowing something.

But, is it the reality that we know, or is it our conception that we know? That is the big issue of philosophy. In order for us to evolve beyond these mental structures, in order for us to engage with the integral reality, in order for us to undertake an integral yoga to spiritualize matter and organize society for sustainability, we must change this characteristic mental way of being. This is what Sri Aurobindo tells us. And here again we come to a similarity between sustainability and yoga: both developments require a radical change in human behavior. For sustainability, consumption has to slow down; for yoga, for liberation of consciousness from these habitual structures, thought processes have to slow down, metabolism has to slow down, light energy has to be created in the body, instead of being dispersed in all kinds of aggressive activities which have characterized all the other levels, until we get to that partition between the lower hemisphere and the higher hemisphere of consciousness. (See the dotted red line above.)

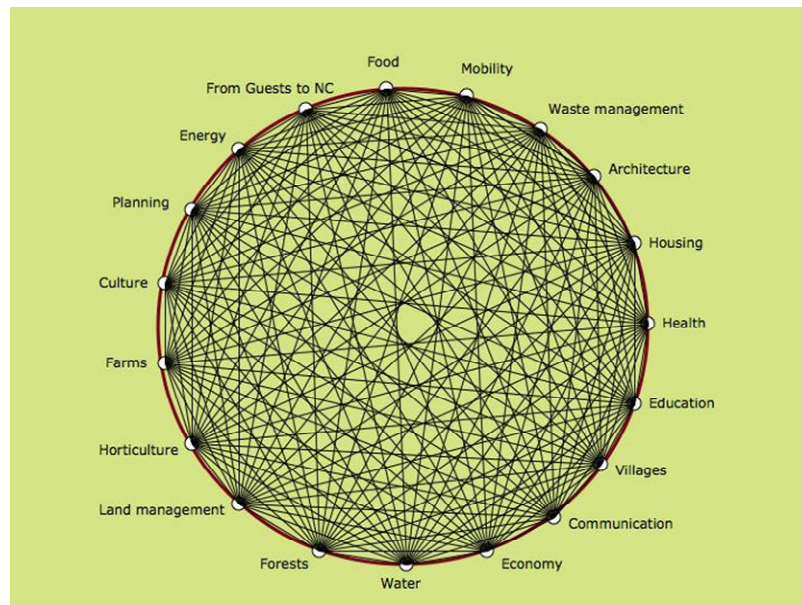
Sri Aurobindo tells us that there are two hemispheres of consciousness. The top tier of consciousness-structures are always hidden – the integral, transpersonal, intuitive, inspired, transcendent levels – their energy, power, efficiency are not normally available in the lower hemisphere of structures, but they are there as potentials. In their own hemisphere they are actualities. The divine consciousness-force is an actuality in the higher hemisphere. But it is not different from the earth; it is another plane of the organization of the earth that we are not yet conscious of. There was a time when we were not conscious of anything! But it was all there; it was just inanimate matter in which all the planes of consciousness were involved, according to Sri Aurobindo's vision. Nature has been doing this yoga of liberating inanimate matter into the various levels of expression throughout evolution, and what's next is the possibility that the higher levels of consciousness-force get expressed in forms of power and harmony, forms of unity and diversity where there is no difference between the two terms – the consciousness and force, the power and harmony, the unity and diversity; they become a totality, which they are now in a hidden sense, but not in a manifest sense.

If we want to think about the future of sustainability in relation to the problems that exist – patterns of overpopulation, patterns of matrimony which encourage overpopulation, cultural patterns which are not sustainable, agricultural patterns which are not sustainable, governmental patterns where power and harmony are completely divorced, which are not sustainable, – in order to radically change these well established patterns of consciousness and force an evolutionary movement is needed.

This integral sustainability idea, this integral paradigm, can therefore be looked at in two completely opposite ways from our present level of consciousness. (See diagram below.³)

Integral Sustainability Platform

ISP



For example, we can think about the relationships between energy, economy, food and education. We can see from this diagram that there are many interrelations. Education and economy and energy today, in the world as it is organized, or even in Auroville as it is organized, are totally disparate provinces of consciousness and force. There isn't much of a relationship between economy and education, if we look at the nation we are in; between education and energy there is hardly any meaningful connection. We can look at this model as a model of disparate diversities, un-unified

³ Compliments of the Integral Sustainability Platform Research Group in Auroville, c/o Alon and Batel)

contradictory patterns of behavior. Or we can look at the connections between food and health and economy and culture and see the possibility of a culture of food sustainability in which there is economic prosperity for everyone, and education, and well-being that increases the value of life.

Today it seems that life doesn't have a very high value, especially in this society. People do not seem to be much concerned about each other's well being. They are more concerned about driving fast on the road, and if there is an accident don't even bother to stop. This is a society of power. And its values are largely conventional; it is not really even rational, much less integral. So how do we bring about a radical change of this situation? It is not going to be by bringing about a conventional understanding about our mutual relationships, although that may be nice to have. But such an understanding is not going to change the aspect of society radically. For that to happen, people in power have to be able to give up their power. They have to be able to see that loving and caring for people is more important than rockets to the moon. Right now the people in power think that rockets to the moon are important, and they are sucking up the energy of the earth to achieve those goals. And to hell with food security and education. We will use our knowledge that we get from our satellites to do urban planning. Urban planning – how to fit more people into a crowded anti-cultural environment. So, then we come to the reality of our society. “An empty stomach may well become a springboard to revolution.”

Food crisis on the horizon

The Hindu April 18, 2010

The level of poverty and hunger has multiplied several-fold in the last five decades, so much so that India ranks 66th among 88 countries in the hunger index. A loud warning bell has been sounded by Ban-Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on the global food crisis. The failure of the World Food Summit held in Rome in November 2009 was unfortunate. It showed the least concern of many governments to the serious problem of food crisis and hunger around the world.



An empty stomach may well become a springboard to revolution. A large crowd waiting to buy cheap priced government rice in Manila.

Sri Aurobindo has indicated in *The Human Cycle* that human ethical, scientific understanding and behavior are incapable of changing situations like this, because these are not essentially ethical, scientific situations. They are vital situations based on vital behavior patterns. Those have to change. In order to change those there has to be a higher command center. In psychology in the Twentieth Century the command center was

identified by Piaget and others as being here – in the forehead. But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have indicated that the higher command center is there – above the head. That there is another Self of our self that is more powerful, a more powerful command center than the head, and definitely more powerful than the stomach. Most of our problems come from the fact that the lower centers have established their intentions and values and processes very well in evolution, and the new centers have not established their patterns and processes as yet. So, Sri Aurobindo tells us that a radical change is necessary, and that nature knows that change has to be made. New energies are being pumped in by the intention of the earth, by the intention of the divine force, the self of the earth. She pumped in the vital energy that got it all moving. She pumped in the mental energy that brought it up to where it is now. Next she has to pump in the Supramental energy that has the power to radically change things. So, then he puts the problem like this...

Overmind and Mind

- Overmind Energy proceeds through an illimitable capacity of separation and combination of the powers and aspects of the integral and indivisible all-comprehending Unity.
- Overmind Consciousness is global in its cognition and can hold any number of seemingly fundamental differences together in a reconciling vision.

Overmind energy acts from a center that doesn't just comprehend the individual or the group, but the totality. And that energy is more efficient than a limited, circumscribed mental or vital energy. Consciousness and force are always together at every level. Overmind consciousness can hold any number of differences together... If we could do that, if our leaders could do that, if our cultural values were based upon that, it would be easy to achieve sustainability. It would be easy to perceive the divine shakti in our movements. But now our perceptions are clouded by other kinds of movements. So then Sri Aurobindo moves up to another level of metaphysical perception.

Overmind and Mind

- If we regard the Powers of the reality as so many Godheads, we can say that the Overmind releases a million Godheads into action, each empowered to create its own world, each world capable of relation, communication and interplay with the others.

Here he has turned the conventional spiritual structure up-side-down. The godheads are not outside the powers of reality. We look at the powers of reality as godheads: life, knowledge, courage, harmony, beauty, competition, mutuality, tragedy... these are powers of reality. In life all the different species on earth, the biosphere, human societies, are all embodiments of that interplay of worlds, but the reality of all the species and their interrelations which constitute a godhead is not something that we generally perceive, because we are not in that consciousness, but they **are** that overmind consciousness already manifested.

Overmind and Mind

- Our human mental consciousness sees the world in sections cut by the reason and sense and put together in a formation which is also sectional; the house it builds is planned to accommodate one or another generalised formulation of Truth, but excludes the rest or admits some only as guests or dependents in the house.

The integral platform – a sectional representation of our reality, with an intuition or a will to integrate but not yet integrated: economy, food, education, energy... that's how our society works and that's how our mind works. A doctor or an artist or a farmer or teacher whose *atp* or *adp* is flowing through the cells to accomplish his aims is not usually conscious of the other's activities and concerns. Each captures a section of reality and experience. Each strives to establish, within and without, what is needed to achieve

his aim. Most people are engaged in an activity of a sectoral nature.

Overmind and Mind

- ...a certain semblance of truth is given to the dictum of Heraclitus that War is the father of all things; for each idea, force, separate consciousness, living being by the very necessity of its ignorance enters into collision with others and tries to live and grow and fulfil itself by independent self-assertion, not by harmony with the rest of existence.

We have to give up too much to become conscious of the harmony of the rest of existence, to achieve our immediate personal needs. We need our energy to achieve those immediate personal needs. We have to sacrifice a lot to take into consideration the harmony of existence. Sacrifice is a principle of yoga, giving up the normal patterns, entering into this overmind consciousness, then acting differently. Those are the three stages of yoga.

Overmind and Mind

- Evolutionary Mind, manifest in individuals or collectivities, throws up a multiplicity of divergent viewpoints, divergent lines of action and lets them work themselves out side by side or in collision or in a certain intermixture; it can make selective harmonies, but it cannot arrive at the harmonic control of a true totality.

An overmind world, the one Sri Aurobindo wants us to create through yoga...

Overmind and Mind

- An Overmind world would be a world of harmony; the world of Ignorance in which we live is a world of disharmony and struggle.
- ..it is only by the evolution in us of the concealed superconscient powers of cosmic Truth and of the Reality in which they are one that the harmony and unity we strive for can be dynamically realised in the very fibre of our being and in its self-expression...

In our life and action and relationships and understanding, he says, the **only** way to achieve a true unity and harmony of being and expression, pattern and process, value and intention, is by an evolution in us of something that is concealed. The overmind energy and consciousness is there but it hasn't evolved.

Part II The Solution of IntegralYoga

Now, Sri Aurobindo is going to prescribe. Now we enter into the transitional movement. Everything we have heard up to now has been about the problem, with a hint of the solution. Now we will start to be guided through the partition of the two hemispheres; the movement of integral yoga is now going to begin – or we are going to begin to hear it in any case. This is Sri Aurobindo's argument for the possibility of a yogic development that would lead to the evolution of new structures and functions of consciousness. He has gone to extraordinary lengths in *The Life Divine* to make this argument from many different angles. This is the fundamental argument.

Overmind and Mind

- ...the fact that behind all our original thinking or authentic perception of things there is a veiled, a half-veiled or a swift unveiled intuitive element is enough to establish a connection between mind and what is above it...
- There is the reaching out of mind to exceed the personal ego limitations, to see things in a certain impersonality and universality.
- Impersonality is the first character of cosmic self; universality, non-limitation by the single or limiting point of view, is the character of cosmic perception and knowledge...

In the *Synthesis of Yoga* he elaborates the process and the necessity of grabbing that intuitive link when it comes up and abdicating, suppressing, annihilating the mind's tendency to rationalize. To allow that link to grow is a fundamental process of the integral yoga. For the rational mind to voluntarily abdicate its habit of grasping the perception, the intuition, and turning it into some kind of framework of understanding. Instead of doing that, to grab that intuitive link and allow it to connect the consciousness to the reality itself. And to go into the reality itself, instead of abstracting and conceptualizing and framing that quick intuitive glimpse that we get, that intuitive authentic perception that we get. Then we start working on it with our minds and that creates the veil.

There is a tendency to impersonalize and universalize and be conscious of the reality. "Impersonality is the first character of cosmic self." This of course comes from the Bhagavad Gita, but Sri Aurobindo is an evolutionary spiritualist so he doesn't need to remind us that this comes from the Bhagavad Gita: "He who sees the self in all things, and all things in the self, how shall he have grief." But for an evolutionary development into a species consciousness that is impersonal, and sees the self in all and all in the self – not a unique spiritual experience but an evolutionary status - that's what he is aiming at.

Universality, non-limitation, by the single or limiting point of view... I have said that he would be prescriptive here. This is about as literal as you can get. There are two successive movements of consciousness by which: ...

Overmind and Mind

- There are two successive movements of consciousness by which we can have access to the superior gradations of our cosmic existence...
- A first movement inward...capable of a direct communication with the universal forces, movements, objects of the cosmos, a direct feeling and opening to them, a direct action on them... so that it feels itself more and more a universal being... (the psychic realization)

In the *Synthesis of Yoga* he means by that “first movement inward”, away from the practical mind, away from the sense mind, away from preoccupation with external patterns of behavior. Negate the sense mind, negate the practical intelligence, negate the rationalizing intellect, move inward. ...That’s what he calls the psychic transformation.

Step two.

Overmind and Mind

- But once this entry into the inner being is accomplished, the inner Self is found to be capable of an opening, an ascent upward... a discovery of a vast static and silent Self – not only our own spiritual being but the true self of all others – it presents itself as the underlying truth of cosmic existence. (the static realization)
- ...there takes place a large dynamic descent of light, knowledge, power, bliss or other supernormal energies into our self of silence – the secret we are seeking, the means of the transition, the needed step towards a supramental transformation. (the dynamic realization)

The silent self...that’s purushottama. That self of all existence which is silent and static and knows itself to be the self of all existence, is normally the goal of yoga and spirituality. That is the complete spiritual realization. That is the truth of cosmic existence, and that universal silent self is perceived as the unmoved mover in all things. There is a chapter in *The Life Divine* where Sri Aurobindo goes into a long argument

about why or how that realization could possibly lead to a divine life on earth. And he takes the negative standpoint, and he makes a long ten page argument for how this realization does not imply that the evolution of earth consciousness is possible. That's why, in the whole mystical tradition, with the exception of *tantra* and some other traditions, in ordinary Vedantic and Buddhistic thought this is the ultimate. And it means leaving the earth and going into the cosmic self. There is nothing more to be done after that. You may live the life of a charitable person but as far as spirituality goes, you are fulfilled. So again we come back to Sri Aurobindo's unique placement of spirituality in the field of evolution. Even this, he says, is just a liberation into a reality which is there behind everything anyway. But if that is the object, - as spiritual people have been saying all along - then why manifest a universe, just to get out of it. Well of course in Buddhism there was no deity manifesting a universe in the first place. There is just that reality and everything that happens in it is just what happens in it. So when you have grasped the reality that's the end, it's the ultimate meaning. But then, says Sri Aurobindo, there is another possibility. From that position, which entails two steps, the inner movement into universality and the upper movement into the static self, there is a third possibility, which is Sri Aurobindo's unique focus and impetus. There takes place a large dynamic descent...into our self of silence. The secret we are seeking. The means of the transition.

If that descent of energy, luminous knowledge, higher mind intuition and overmind power, doesn't descend into that silent self, then everything stays the same. You just have a higher consciousness, the same higher consciousness that many Buddhist practitioners and Hindu saints have, and others. But it doesn't help us achieve "sustainability". It doesn't justify the earth existence. Suffering is still there. The wheel of ignorance and suffering is still there, even though the Buddha said that when we achieve realization everyone is liberated. Utter nonsense. There is a sense of it, a perception of total liberation and you know everything is an illusion, but the suffering is still going on. So Sri Aurobindo points out that this is the problem of the illusionist spiritual philosophies. They are satisfied with the static realization and the suffering goes on. Or in Christianity you leave the body and go into infinite light, and the suffering of the world goes on. You accept poverty in life because you can't take it with you when you leave. And anyway when you leave what you get is much better.

Part III The Soul's Choice

So, this is the radical evolutionary spiritual movement. And this is what *Savitri* is all about. The whole book of *Savitri* is a narration of these three stages of the yoga of transformation. For example, in Book One:

Savitri, Bk. 1, Canto 3

A vision lightened on the viewless heights,
A wisdom illumined from the voiceless depths:
A deeper interpretation greatened Truth,
A grand reversal of the Night and Day;
All the world's values changed heightening life's aim;
A wiser word, a larger thought came in
Than what the slow labour of human mind can bring,
A secret sense awoke that could perceive
A Presence and a Greatness everywhere.

The world was a conception and a birth
Of Spirit in Matter into living forms,
And Nature bore the Immortal in her womb,
That she might climb through him to eternal life.

Let me just comment on the idea of the 'grand reversal of the Night and Day' – previously we have thought that the Night is all of this worldly experience and the Day is the luminous spiritual realization. This is a reversal: all of the luminous divine experience is here in the Night, in the illusion, in the falsehood. We don't need to leave all of this to find that. When that descent comes or that inner universality opens, then this becomes the spiritual reality.

There is another line a few cantos along in which Sri Aurobindo says, "the great World Mother, by her sacrifice, made her soul the body of our state." All of this matter is that. And all of these dualities and conflicts are that, trying to liberate itself into forms of power and harmony.

Now we are going into the last major canto of *Savitri* in order to illustrate the gravity of this proposition. And what I am going to say is a purely allegorical interpretation. In the first section of *Savitri* we have Sri Aurobindo's narration of this process of liberation and reaching the point where the luminous powers descend in him, and he becomes the master of Nature. From that position he invokes from her, Nature, a being who is supposed to take birth and lead humanity to the transformation, in the form of radiant, luminous, inspired speech and force and rhythm and harmony and universality. This being is supposed to bring **that** to humanity at this stage of our evolution. That's the first third of *Savitri*. He narrates the process of bringing that force to birth.

The second section of *Savitri* is about that force in a mortal, uniting with a mortal and learning to live in the static self, in the silence, learning to be the universal divine force in a mortal body. The last section is about that consciousness, which has established itself in the static self, in the human body, continuing to be conscious after the death of the body, and bringing this yogic force into death, confronting death, and irradiating with that energy of consciousness life after death, making a continuity between this death and the next birth, sustaining consciousness throughout the process of death and then reincarnating. But that static cosmic consciousness, which is permanent and powerful, discovers that death is the divine. And it has entered not only into negative death but into positive death. It's universal light, love, power, bliss, liberation. She is full of that. And then there must be the choice – to accept that as the ultimate or to bring that power back into incarnation for the benefit of evolution.

According to what I know about spiritual traditions that is not a choice that has been given. In Buddhist reincarnation you can come back in order to help others liberate themselves, but you do not come back in order to transform life. So this is a debate that Sri Aurobindo has in *Savitri* a number of times, and by the time we get to the end of the third section we know what he is talking about. In that last major canto, called 'the soul's choice', *Savitri*, the divine consciousness that has manifested as a mortal, entered into death, reunited with the supreme, discovered that death is also the divine, unlimited, universal force of love, is offered six temptations to accept that as the end, the ultimate realization. Even then, after all of Aswapati's yoga, after all of *Savitri*'s practice and conquest and manifestation of the Divine Mother, after all of her death experience and mastery of the darkness, she still has to face the temptation of the traditional spiritual liberation.

I think Sri Aurobindo is trying to tell us something here. When, and if, we get to this point, it is very easy to give up interest in the threefold mind-life-body complex, unless the third step has happened and the divine force has descended. And then there is a dynamic energy and will to not give up the earth's evolution, and *Savitri* is full of that energy, but she keeps getting the temptation to go back into the static realization. It's the last battle. And it goes on for many pages. It is a twenty page battle between her and the divine, between the Divine Mother and the Absolute. Is her job really the evolution of the earth or has she not already accomplished everything that can be accomplished by yoga?

I will go through that last battle with you briefly. I have selected summaries of the six temptations. My intention is to allow us to hear, in a brief summary form, what extraordinary value Sri Aurobindo has given to this choice. This is the very best example of his conception of the earth and consciousness as the real business of spirituality, the place of the divine, and not somewhere else. These are a few brief selections only of several longer passages.

The first temptation and refusal: Yet, says the Lord of Love and Light to *Savitri*, the luminous intuition who has survived death...if thou wouldst abandon the vexed world, renounce the tie that joins thee to earth-kind...

(The audio file may be downloaded at <www.universityofhumanunity.org>.)

Savitri, Bk.11,Canto 1

1st temptation and refusal

Yet if thou wouldst abandon the vexed world,
Careless of the dark moan of things below,
Tread down the isthmus, overleap the flood,
Cancel thy contract with the labouring Force;
Renounce the tie that joins thee to earth-kind,
Cast off thy sympathy with mortal hearts.
Arise, vindicate thy spirit's conquered right:
Relinquishing thy charge of transient breath,
Under the cold gaze of the indifferent stars
Leaving thy borrowed body on the sod,
Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home.

Savitri's response...

“O besetter of man's soul with life and death
And the world's pleasure and pain and Day and Night,
Tempting his heart with the far lure of heaven,
Testing his strength with the close touch of hell,
I climb not to thy everlasting Day,
Even as I have shunned thy eternal Night.
To me who turn not from thy terrestrial Way,
Give back the other self my nature asks.
Thy spaces need him not to help their joy;
Earth needs his beautiful spirit made by thee
To fling delight down like a net of gold.
Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
The forge where the Archmason shapes his works.”

The other self her nature asks is of course the human being, the soul of mankind... but the Absolute says to her again...

2nd temptation and refusal

O flame, withdraw into thy luminous self.
Or else return to thy original might
On a seer-summit above thought and world;
Partner of my unhoured eternity,
Be one with the infinity of my power:
For thou art the World-Mother and the Bride.
Out of the fruitless yearning of earth's life,
Out of her feeble unconvincing dream,
Recovering wings that cross infinity
Pass back into the Power from which thou cam'st.

But Savitri answered to the radiant God:
“In vain thou temptst with solitary bliss
Two spirits saved out of a suffering world;
My soul and his indissolubly linked
In the one task for which our lives were born,
To raise the world to God in deathless Light,
To bring God down to the world on earth we came,
To change the earthly life to life divine.

The two are the mortal who is ready for that power, and the power itself who descends in him, so that she becomes the bride on earth just as she is the bride of the supreme in the higher hemisphere; she manifests in the earth field with the same relationship to the Self in all, as she has on the transcendent plane; she is his force there and can become his force here. That is the possibility the yogi had originally invoked.

3rd temptation and refusal

“Choose, spirit, thy supreme choice not given again;
For now from my highest being looks at thee
The nameless formless peace where all things rest.
In a happy vast sublime cessation know,—
An immense extinction in eternity,
A point that disappears in the infinite,—
Felicity of the extinguished flame,
Last sinking of a wave in a boundless sea,
End of the trouble of thy wandering thoughts,
Close of the journeying of thy pilgrim soul.
Accept, O music, weariness of thy notes,
O stream, wide breaking of thy channel banks.”

In other words, give up form and just be a sea of bliss. It sounds nice. And so there she is, at the end of this long epic of yoga, in total unimaginable peace and bliss. It's given.

The moments fell into eternity.
But someone yearned within a bosom unknown
And silently the woman's heart replied:

“Thy peace, O Lord, a boon within to keep
Amid the roar and ruin of wild Time
For the magnificent soul of man on earth.
Thy calm, O Lord, that bears thy hands of joy.”

This is the link, the link that she never cut with life on earth. And if human beings were conscious of that degree of peace and calm and the divine joy, sustainability would not be a big deal. We could easily give up our habits. We could easily forego the next trip to the moon, and educate and culture and feed everyone.

4th temptation and refusal

A second time the eternal cry arose:
“Wide open are the ineffable gates in front.
My spirit leans down to break the knot of earth,
Amorous of oneness without thought or sign
To cast down wall and fence, to strip heaven bare,
See with the large eye of infinity,
Unweave the stars and into silence pass.”

In an immense and world-destroying pause
She heard a million creatures cry to her.
Through the tremendous stillness of her thoughts
Immeasurably the woman's nature spoke:
“Thy oneness, Lord, in many approaching hearts,
My sweet infinity of thy numberless souls.”

5th temptation and refusal

A third time swelled the great admonishing call:
“I spread abroad the refuge of my wings.
Out of its incommunicable deeps
My power looks forth of mightiest splendour, stilled
Into its majesty of sleep, withdrawn
Above the dreadful whirlings of the world.”

A sob of things was answer to the voice,
And passionately the woman’s heart replied:
“Thy energy, Lord, to seize on woman and man,
To take all things and creatures in their grief
And gather them into a mother’s arms.”

6th temptation and refusal

Solemn and distant like a seraph’s lyre
A last great time the warning sound was heard:
“I open the wide eye of solitude
To uncover the voiceless rapture of my bliss,
Where in a pure and exquisite hush it lies
Motionless in its slumber of ecstasy,
Resting from the sweet madness of the dance
Out of whose beat the throb of hearts was born.”

Then all the woman yearningly replied:
“Thy embrace which rends the living knot of pain,
Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe,
Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,
Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men.”

For Sri Aurobindo, the **only** chance, the **only** possibility, for the transition to a sustainable life, a spiritual life, a life of harmony and power, is this – an evolutionary transformation of earth consciousness. And it’s not a religion, or a few individuals seeking liberation (though some will take it to be such). It’s an evolutionary change that has to happen in the species, a shift in the functioning of the species, which is the result of another influence, another consciousness-force coming in. People who practice Integral Yoga are meant to be channels, instruments, to aid Nature in her process of bridging, but it is not for us. It’s for the earth.

The Mother's grace was invoked for a much larger purpose than for the relatively unencumbered life style of a few people in south India, or somewhere. The problem is much bigger. Which is not to say that we shouldn't try to improve food and health and economy and culture by any means. But the relationship between yoga and sustainability is a causal relationship. It's a necessity of nature that a new consciousness evolves. In an early canto of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo says, "A world's desire compelled her mortal birth." So when we are trying to build toilets and get health services going, this is fine, but we shouldn't forget that it's another process which is essential.

It has been really nice to be able to do this on Darshan day, because there is so much other possibility in the air. 24-04-10

Rod

Discussion

It's an interesting definition of sustainability, unlike others that we have heard in our seminars. People go on talking about sustaining something but they don't seem to know what it is. I always wondered what they really want to sustain.

I had prepared quite a few notes on the literature of sustainability. Most of it is based on the destruction of the environment, loss of species, the discrepancies between the rich and the poor, all of which threaten survivability of the species. Then the question arises whether we can fix some of those things. *The Limits to Growth* suggests that by 2050 it may be possible for humanity to sustain a lifestyle approximately equal to that of eastern Europe around 1960, and then that becomes a value system with an intention to try to prevent total collapse of the life systems by adopting clean technologies and simple life styles, and advocating that as a way to preserve a reasonable quality of life into the future. But even when people say that, they know that it is highly unlikely to work. Even in the last version of *The Limits to Growth*, they say it is easy to make suggestions about how to do all of those things, like global sharing of ecological footprint limits, but who is going to accept that? How is it going to be put in practice when there are such huge discrepancies between the way people live in North Africa and North America? And when we look at the rate of population growth, it's easy to see that 0 population growth is not going to be achieved any time soon in India and China. And so the biologist E. O. Wilson says that by 2050 India and China alone will need 1.6 planet earths. This brings to us an awareness of the problems, and then we try to find some reasonable solutions, but they aren't going to work.

Don't you think the change has to be on a multiplicity of levels? Are we just supposed to wait until the change of consciousness comes?

Absolutely not. The whole point of this yoga, which the Mother has addressed in her writings, is that they are not separate, but the relationship is causal. So economic adjustments are not going to lead to a change of consciousness. They may enable us to

sustain ourselves a bit longer but they are not going to solve the problem. Because ultimately you run into a conflict between the principle of economic adjustment and the drives of people. The concept of sustainability comes from the integral paradigm which only a small fraction of the human species is aware of, much less motivated by. There is a huge number of human beings that haven't yet entered the rational stage of development. They may like the idea but all of their life patterns are against it. So yes, the Mother created Auroville because with our spiritual understanding of nature, we can't abandon nature and society, and we can't neglect to try to influence the mind and life and body with our spiritual energy. But we can't expect our mind and life and body to produce the solutions. They have to be transformed by the spiritual energy; we keep the link but we aren't supposed to just maintain and slightly improve upon the old patterns. So it becomes a risky business. How much do you let go and how much do you hold on to, in order to let the other energy come in?

How can we manage this other energy on a collective scale?

It has to be an evolutionary process. This is the faith factor. We have to believe that this new energy is established and it is universal. From time to time we can leap a little and gain another foothold. Whether or not it can be done in time is a question the Mother and Sri Aurobindo continued to ask until the end. In the last cantos of *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo says that if humanity is not able to make the choice then nature will find another way to manifest the truth.

What happens if humanity does not succeed? There have been other attempts that failed.

We don't know what will happen if it succeeds or if it doesn't succeed. But if we have experienced the Mother's energy, and on the basis of these theories and arguments, we may believe that a greater energy for realization has actually been created, which was not available for the other attempts that were made. And that gives us the foothold.