If you want union in the world, first unify the different parts of your own being.

THE MOTHER
(CWM, 15: 66)

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Curated by: Chaitanya Datla
Editorial

Towards Human Unity

The ideas of unity and oneness are found throughout human history and remind us that in essence we are all one. *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* — the world is one family — is a well-known saying from the ancient Indian texts. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus wrote, “it is wisdom to admit that all things are one,” and “One out of all and all out of One.” In the modern era we find mentioned in the traditional motto of the United States, “*e pluribus unum*” — out of many, one. “*Liberty, equality, fraternity*” were the inspiring cries from the Age of Enlightenment. As much as there seem to be forces working towards unity and oneness through such noble hymns and mottos there is also the opposing reality of uncertainties of war and terrorism, political and economic struggles, environmental problems, and unending crises looming on the horizon as the obvious indicators of our present state of humanity. Where then lies the hope to realise the ideal of unity in mankind? What really is human unity? How can we move forward towards it?

Thousands of years ago the Rig Vedic hymns expressed the highest ideal of human unity as the practice of a sense of living human oneness in thought, feeling and life; it gave place to true love of humanity and recognised the real unity between man and man.3

“समानी व आकूःति: समाना हृदयन्ति वः ।
समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा व: सुसहास्यति॥१॥

One and common be your aspiration, united your hearts, common to you be your mind,—so that close companionship may be yours.”

The conventional idea of ‘united family’ that has dominated Western and religious thought hopes to make men live together like brothers, a loving happy family. But, this is a “fragile bond”. Unmask the appearance of a united joint-family and we are left with petty envy, greed, discontent and hatred. And one day the so-called ‘united’ explodes from frivolous quarrels into a great war, a separation forever. A united human race is nothing but the united joint-family on a larger scale. But to be united is not the same as unity, our ideal. And, the unity we seek for in the family is the same as the unity we seek in the nation and the world. Who or what then is the principal obstacle, the element that separates and divides us? From whichever angle we examine — be it political, psychological or spiritual — we arrive at the same answer, the enemy is human egoism, the egoism of the individual, the egoism of class and nation.

At a social and political level, in the modern era, several International Relations theories have been put forward to explain the dynamics of harmony and disharmony between individuals, states and ultimately the world. Realism, for example, presents human nature as belligerent and egocentric. According to this perspective, states are the most important actors and tend to pursue self-interest, and the international system is anarchic; therefore, conflict is unavoidable and states will eventually resort to war. Liberalism, on the contrary, perceives human beings as intrinsically good, and believes that humans are perfectible and peace and harmony between states is achievable. This view argues that states can work together and international institutions can help states cooperate. The more recent theory of Constructivism takes a somewhat middle ground. It begins with the premise that anarchy and security-based competition are not inherent to the international system, but rather these develop through a “process” of interactions or learned behaviour. It claims that significant aspects of international relations are socially constructed rather than unavoidable consequences of human nature and other characteristics of international politics. Each theory takes its own position to analyse international conflict and builds frameworks in the hope to create a more peaceful and orderly system. The effectiveness of these mechanical frameworks, that overlook the deeper psychological complexity of human nature that reflects on the international system, is questionable.

In practical terms, several well-intentioned ideas have been introduced as means of keeping international peace, giving hope to the dream of human unity. Democracy is one such ideal advocated by liberalist thought. It is argued that democracy is the ideal form of government for nations to maintain peace in the world. There is a strong supposition that liberal democracies

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1 CWSA, 13: 226
2 http://www.greatseal.com/mottoes/unum.html
3 Sri Aurobindo’s reference to this hymn can be found here: CWSA, 25: 568
4 CWSA, 16: 446, only the last couplet from Mandala 10, Sukta 191 is quoted here.
5 CWSA, 25: 611
hesitate to engage in war with each other and therefore are more peaceful in spirit. Yet, the widespread practice of democracy has not dealt away with the problems of conflict. Similarly, the noble motive of international organisation is another high-minded ideal aimed at achieving human unity. The growing insecurity, disorder and conflict between nations gave birth to the League of Nations, and later the United Nations. These institutions aim for international peace and security, to achieve harmony among the nations of the world. Although far from the ideal, at present, such arranged centres have become indispensable to help create a more efficient and organised international system. Besides, in today’s globalised era the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures and people has brought forth greater political and economic cooperation — e.g. the European Union — between nations. The geographical, economic and cultural boundaries have started to blur. No nation can separate itself and live its own isolated life. Science, commerce and technology have drawn disparate masses of humanity together by “a process of subtle unification into a single mass.”

Contingent to the time we live in, these and many other ideas have been proposed to establish political, administrative and economic unions for maintaining international peace and order. But the changing trend of these institutions and unions show how volatile they are. For example, a League of Nations was born to be soon replaced by the United Nations. The United Kingdom withdraws from European Union after being a member state for 47 years. Absolute systems such as democracy, socialism, individualism, collectivism, imperialism and nationalism are enthusiastically created today to be abandoned tomorrow for another. These external means of unification appear to merely serve as temporary devices without bringing in enduring change. Moreover, the question of real harmony between man and man, the individual and the group and the inner need and aspiration of the individual for freedom, equality, brotherhood and a living sense of human oneness, remains unanswered.

Sri Aurobindo writes, “…while it is possible to construct a precarious and quite mechanical unity by political and administrative means, the unity of the human race, even if achieved, can only be secured and can only be made real if the religion of humanity, which is at present the highest active ideal of mankind, spiritualises itself and becomes the general inner law of human life.”

Thus, for unity to be manifested in humanity it has to be realised within us; when we awaken the soul in man and overcome the enemy within — human egoism — we can give place to love of mankind and recognise the real unity between man and man.

The aim of this issue on human unity is to bring a deeper understanding on how we can move towards the real living unity of the human race as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Considering the vastness of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy this issue presents an overview and attempts to answer only some of the key questions relating to human unity. We hope the writings and passages from this journal will inspire readers to look at the complete works for deeper insight into the topic, in particular ‘The Ideal of Human Unity’ written between September, 1915 to July, 1918. Although written a century ago its analysis and message remain relevant today. In the preface of the book Sri Aurobindo states “The main contentions advanced in these pages also remain unaffected by the course of events.”

It is significant to note that Sri Aurobindo wrote ‘The Ideal of Human Unity’ in the midst of World War I, the greatest conflict in history at that time, showing mankind the possibility and way forward towards human unity. This in itself speaks of Sri Aurobindo’s vision for humanity, it was not tied to mere outward facts of unity but based on a realisation of true spiritual oneness.

Chaitanya Datla

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Unity — An Inevitable Aim of Nature

“Man is there to affirm himself in the universe, that is his first business, but also to evolve and finally to exceed himself: he has to enlarge his partial being into a complete being, his partial consciousness into an integral consciousness; he has to achieve mastery of his environment but also world-union and world-harmony; he has to realise his individuality but also to enlarge it into a cosmic self and a universal and spiritual delight of existence.”

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 21-22: 711)

Editor’s note: Sri Aurobindo tells us that unity of mankind is part of Nature’s eventual scheme and must come about.

Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding, whether in the power that moves it or the sense of the aim towards which it moves, than its own communal and collective life. Sociology does not help us, for it only gives us the general story of the past and the external conditions under which communities have survived. History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time. What we do seize are current or recurrent phenomena, facile generalisations, partial ideas. We talk of democracy, aristocracy and autocracy, collectivism and individualism, imperialism and nationalism, the State and the commune, capitalism and labour; we advance hasty generalisations and make absolute systems which are positively announced today only to be abandoned perforce tomorrow; we espouse causes and ardent enthusiasms whose triumph turns to an early disillusionment and then forsake them for others, perhaps for those that we have taken so much trouble to destroy. For a whole century mankind thirsts and battles after liberty and earns it with a bitter expense of toil, tears and blood; the century that enjoys without having fought for it turns away as from a puerile illusion and is ready to renounce the depreciated gain as the price of some new good. And all this happens because our whole thought and action with regard to our collective life is shallow and empirical; it does not seek for, it does not base itself on a firm, profound and complete knowledge. The moral is not the vanity of human life, of its arduors and enthusiasms and of the ideals it pursues, but the necessity of a wiser, larger, more patient search after its true law and aim.

Today the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our consciousness. The emergence of an ideal in human thought is always the sign of an intention in Nature, but not always of an intention to accomplish; sometimes it indicates only an attempt which is predestined to temporary failure. For Nature is slow and patient in her methods. She takes up ideas and half carries them out, then drops them by the wayside to resume them in some future era with a better combination. She tempts humanity, her thinking instrument, and tests how far it is ready for the harmony she has imagined; she allows and incites man to attempt and fail, so that he may learn and succeed better another time. Still the ideal, having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 25: 279-280)

Harmony between the Individual and the Group

“It is the last ideal of love at which strife tries ignorantly to arrive; for by strife one can only arrive at an adjustment of the two opposite demands, not at a stable harmony, a compromise between two conflicting egoisms and not the fusing of them into each other. Still, strife does lead to an increasing mutual comprehension which eventually makes the attempt at real oneness possible.” Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, 25: 290)

Editor’s note: The conflict between the individual and the group, freedom and authority, is a common experience that manifests at all levels of the societal hierarchy, the family, the community, the nation and the world at large. According to Sri Aurobindo, through this strife between the two elements Nature is working out a harmony that will help realise the perfect society. Below we highlight a few passages of Sri
Aurobindo on the relation between the individual and the social aggregate.

The whole process of Nature depends on a balancing and a constant tendency to harmony between two poles of life, the individual whom the whole or aggregate nourishes and the whole or aggregate which the individual helps to constitute. Human life forms no exception to the rule. Therefore the perfection of human life must involve the elaboration of an as yet unaccomplished harmony between these two poles of our existence, the individual and the social aggregate. The perfect society will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity.

[...] The family, the commune, the clan or tribe, the class, the city state or congeries of tribes, the nation, the empire are so many stages in this progress and constant enlargement. If the smaller aggregates were destroyed as soon as the larger are successfully formed, this graduation would result in no complexity; but Nature does not follow this course. She seldom destroys entirely the types she has once made or only destroys that for which there is no longer any utility; the rest she keeps in order to serve her need or her passion for variety, richness, multiformity and only effaces the dividing lines or modifies the characteristics and relations sufficiently to allow of the larger unity she is creating. Therefore at every step humanity is confronted with various problems which arise not only from the difficulty of accord between the interests of the individual and those of the immediate aggregate, the community, but between the need and interests of the smaller integralities and the growth of that larger whole which is to ensphere them all.

History has preserved for us scattered instances of this travail, instances of failure and success which are full of instruction. [...] The whole past of India for the last two thousand years and more has been the attempt, unavailing in spite of many approximations to success, to overcome the centrifugal tendency of an extraordinary number and variety of disparate elements, the family, the commune, the clan, the caste, the small regional state or people, the large linguistic unit, the religious community, the nation within the nation. We may perhaps say that here Nature tried an experiment of unparalleled complexity and potential richness, accumulating all possible difficulties in order to arrive at the most opulent result. But in the end the problem proved insoluble or, at least, was not solved and Nature had to resort to her usual deus ex machina denouement, the instrumentality of a foreign rule.

[...] The perfection of the individual in a perfected society or eventually in a perfected humanity — understanding perfection always in a relative and progressive sense — is the inevitable aim of Nature. But the progress of all the individuals in a society does not proceed pari passu, with an equal and equable march. Some advance, others remain stationary — absolutely or relatively, — others fall back.

[...] The human individual tends to exist in himself and to exceed the limits of the family, the clan, the class, the nation; and even, that self-sufficiency on one side, that universality on the other are the essential elements of his perfection. Therefore, just as the systems of social aggregation which depend on the domination of a class or classes over others must change or dissolve, so the social aggregates which stand in the way of this perfection of the individual and seek to coerce him within their limited mould and into the rigidity of a narrow culture or petty class or national interest, must find their term and their day of change or destruction under the irresistible impulsion of progressing Nature. (CWSA, 25: 285-289)

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Thus the law for the individual is to perfect his individuality by free development from within, but to respect and to aid and be aided by the same free development in others. His law is to harmonise his life with the life of the social aggregate and to pour himself out as a force for growth and perfection on humanity. The law for the community or nation is equally to perfect its corporate existence by a free development from within, aiding and taking full advantage of that of the individual, but to respect and to aid and be aided by the same free development of other communities and nations. Its law is to harmonise its life with that of the human aggregate and to pour itself out as a force for growth and perfection on humanity. The law for humanity is to pursue its upward evolution towards the finding and expression of the Divine in the type of mankind, taking full advantage of the free development and gains of all individuals and nations and groupings of men, to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not only ideally one divine family, but even then, when it has succeeded in unifying itself, to respect, aid and be aided by the free growth and activity of its individuals and constituent aggregates. (CWSA, 25: 71)

SRI AUROBINDO
The State — Its Purpose and Limitations

Editor’s note: The idea of the State is often mistaken for that of the nation. The State is the political and administrative structure of an aggregate with clearly defined boundaries within which it exercises its authority. The nation is a persistent psychological unit, an organism that lives and grows, not limited by political or physical boundaries. The State is not an organism, it works like a machine and thus tends to uniformity. Below is a collection of Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts on the State idea, its use and limitations.

What, after all, is the State idea, this idea of the organised community to which the individual has to be immolated? Theoretically, it is the subordination of the individual to the good of all that is demanded; practically, it is his subordination to a collective egoism, political, military, economic, which seeks to satisfy certain collective aims and ambitions shaped and imposed on the great mass of the individuals by a smaller or larger number of ruling persons who are supposed in some way to represent the community. [...] (CWSA, 25: 296)

The business of the State, so long as it continues to be a necessary element in human life and growth, is to provide all possible facilities for cooperative action, to remove obstacles, to prevent all really harmful waste and friction,—a certain amount of waste and friction is necessary and useful to all natural action,— and, removing avoidable injustice, to secure for every individual a just and equal chance of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature. So far the aim in modern socialism is right and good. But all unnecessary interference with the freedom of man’s growth is or can be harmful. Even cooperative action is injurious if, instead of seeking the good of all compatibly with the necessities of individual growth,—and without individual growth there can be no real and permanent good of all,—it immolates the individual to a communal egoism and prevents so much free room and initiative as is necessary for the flowering of a more perfectly developed humanity. So long as humanity is not full-grown, so long as it needs to grow and is capable of a greater perfectibility, there can be no static good of all; nor can there be any progressive good of all independent of the growth of the individuals composing the all. All collectivist ideals which seek unduly to subordinate the individual, really envisage a static condition, whether it be a present status or one it soon hopes to establish, after which all attempt at serious change would be regarded as an offence of impatient individualism against the peace, just routine and security of the happily established communal order. Always it is the individual who progresses and compels the rest to progress; the instinct of the collectivity is to stand still in its established order. Progress, growth, realisation of wider being give his greatest sense of happiness to the individual; status, secure ease to the collectivity. And so it must be as long as the latter is more a physical and economic entity than a self-conscious collective soul.

It is therefore quite improbable that in the present conditions of the race a healthy unity of mankind can be brought about by State machinery, whether it be by a grouping of powerful and organised States enjoying carefully regulated and legalised relations with each other or by the substitution of a single World-State for the present half chaotic half ordered comity of nations, — be the form of that World-State a single empire like the Roman or a federated unity. Such an external or administrative unity may be intended in the near future of mankind in order to accustom the race to the idea of a common life, to its habit, to its possibility, but it cannot be really healthy, durable or beneficial over all the true line of human destiny unless something be developed more profound, internal and real. Otherwise the experience of the ancient world will be repeated on a larger scale and in other circumstances. The experiment will break down and give place to a new reconstructive age of confusion and anarchy. Perhaps this experience also is necessary for mankind; yet it ought to be possible for us now to avoid it by subordinating mechanical means to our true development through a moralised and even a spiritualised humanity united in its inner soul and not only in its outward life and body. (CWSA, 25: 301-303)

SRI AUROBINDO

Politicians

“Nothing of the kind can be asserted of the modern politician in any part of the world; he does not represent the soul of a people or its aspirations. What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral
conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision, but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the claptrap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is patent in every country of the world and only the hypnotised acquiescence of all, even of the intellectual classes, in the great organised sham, cloaks and prolongs the malady, the acquiescence that men yield to everything that is habitual and makes the present atmosphere of their lives. Yet it is by such minds that the good of all has to be decided, to such hands that it has to be entrusted, to such an agency calling itself the State that the individual is being more and more called upon to give up the government of his activities. As a matter of fact, it is in no way the largest good of all that is thus secured, but a great deal of organised blundering and evil with a certain amount of good which makes for real progress, because Nature moves forward always in the midst of all stumblings and secures her aims in the end more often in spite of man's imperfect mentality than by its means."

SRI AUROBINDO
(CWSA, 25: 296-297)

Significance of War

Editor’s note: The entire history of mankind is riddled with conflict and war, the ancient and medieval wars, the world wars, the cold war, civil wars, ethnic conflict etc. Many attempts have been made to appease conflict if not totally eliminate war. But, diplomacy and negotiations alone cannot remove the root cause of conflict. Sri Aurobindo explains in clear terms the true reason for the continuous occurrence of war and the condition for its complete passing.

So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return. War itself, it is hoped, will end war; the expense, the horror, the butchery, the disturbance of tranquil life, the whole confused sanguinary madness of the thing has reached or will reach such colossal proportions that the human race will fling the monstrosity behind it in weariness and disgust. But weariness and disgust, horror and pity, even the opening of the eyes to reason by the practical fact of the waste of human life and energy and the harm and extravagance are not permanent factors; they last only while the lesson is fresh. Afterwards, there is forgetfulness; human nature recovers itself and recovers the instincts that were temporarily dominated. A long peace, even a certain organisation of peace may conceivably result, but so long as the heart of man remains what it is, the peace will come to an end, the organisation will break down under the stress of human passions. War is no longer, perhaps, a biological necessity, but it is still a psychological necessity; what is within us, must manifest itself outside.

[…] Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men, but a dominant sense of unity and commonality, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers, — that is a fragile bond, — but as parts of himself, only when he has learned to live not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a larger universal consciousness can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapons, pass out of his life without the possibility of return. Meanwhile that he should struggle even by illusions towards that end, is an excellent sign; for it shows that the truth behind the illusion is pressing towards the hour when it may become manifest as reality.

SRI AUROBINDO
(CWSA, 25: 610-611)
When Young

Yuvaan had spent most of the afternoon reading a long email from his friend Rishi. Since their time in Haridwar the two hadn’t met, but had been in touch through occasional emails and phone calls. Rishi had travelled to Almora and finding the little village of Kasar Devi quite suitable for his temperament had stayed put there for the past six months.

Rishi wrote at length about some of Swami Vivekananda’s works that he had been re-reading in the past few months. The association of Swami ji with Kasar Devi was a trigger, he said. Yuvaan was thrilled to read all this since he too had recently read a bit about Swamiji’s ‘visits’ with Sri Aurobindo in Alipore prison. One passage which Rishi had quoted especially appealed to Yuvaan.

Reading this, Yuvaan’s mind naturally went to Auroville. During the past several months, Yuvaan had been there a few times and had the opportunity to learn — both from the Mother’s works and by talking to a few Aurovillians — about the vision that guides this ‘city of dawn’. The ideal of human unity based on an inner spiritual oneness which is the very soul of Auroville, symbolised by the magnificent Matrimandir, could not have been envisioned by anyone other than the Divine Mother Herself, so Auroville is Divine’s Own Dream—as an old-time Aurovillian had once told him. Reading the passage from Swami Vivekananda, Yuvaan felt a strange sense of assurance rising in him—yes indeed, only in India whose foundational work, whose raison d’être is the spiritualisation of the human race, can Auroville be dreamed of by the Divine Himself.

Swami ji’s words kept ringing in Yuvaan all during his evening walk at the seaside, bringing up different strands of thoughts based on what he had been recently learning from his study of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s works. Back at his apartment he sat down to write out some of these thoughts thinking that he would organise them later for his reply to Rishi.

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The Supramental Consciousness—the consciousness behind the link world of maharloka that the Veda speaks of—is now working on the earth. A new creation is slowly taking shape in the subtle realms. All the chaos and conflict we see around are nothing but signs of the old creation trying to exert and assert itself. We can already see some clear signs of the new consciousness at work. A greater yearning for life beyond the ordinary human life of bodily pleasures and small material and mental gains is afloat in growing sections of humanity. Having enjoyed the gains of material comfort and security resulting from the age of reason and technological and scientific advancement, more and more people are seeking something deeper and higher. A greater subjective approach is the catchword in fields such as education, health and wellness, arts, design etc.

We may say that there is a slow but clear movement or change of consciousness that is working behind the progressive march of humanity—from an age of Reason to one of a deeper, inner true subjectivism and slowly to an age of seeking the suprarational or spiritual truth of life. But

1 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 4
what does this movement—from rational to suprarational or spiritual mean for addressing the challenges we face today?

Humanity has tried to address these challenges using different approaches—through all kinds of laws, policies, institutions, structures etc, and by promoting all the ‘right’ secular values such as equality, liberty, human rights, universal education, and also through elevation of nobler ideals such as compassion for all life and nature, peace, non-violence etc. And yet nothing seems to be working. What is missing?

Let us take an example of man’s long-cherished ideal of Human Unity, which in the Indian tradition has been spoken of as ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”—All earth is one family.’ Sri Aurobindo once wrote that the future progress of humanity requires a reawakening of the old “spiritual practicality” and a large and profound vision of life and progress which were at the core of the Eastern, particularly Indian, view of human existence. Also, this spiritual truth of India when infused with the light of a greater power of organisation which the West is particularly good at, will yield new forms of action, force and influence which can help humanity advance further.

In other words, the future lies in this great coming together of the best of the East, particularly of India—her spiritual practicality and her large and profound vision—and the best of the West—the power of organisation. But quite understandably, we are not speaking here of a mental ideal of unity, because mental-ethical ideals are easily broken at the first attack from life’s complexities and circumstances.

A mental ideal of unity is unable to handle diversity without imposing a certain mental idea of homogeneity or uniformity. The truer unity will not impose uniformity, but neither will it accept abuse and disrespect of all that is different and unknown. A deeper unity will not eradicate diversity, but neither will it allow inhumanity and mindless destruction of all that is good, beautiful, true and humane—simply in the name of “all beliefs are equal” type of post-modernistic relativism.

The Indian ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam must be understood in its entirety and complexity, and not just made empty political or moralistic rhetoric. Studying the context when this particular phrase appears in stories of Hitopadesha and Panchatantra and a few other texts can be an interesting and eye-opening study in itself. The complete couplet reads as follows:

अर्ध निजः परेश्वर गणना लघु वेतसाम्
उदारचरितानामः तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

ayam nijah paroveti gananā laghu-chetasām
udāra charitānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam

Translated, it reads: “This is my own and that a stranger”—is the calculation of those with narrow consciousness. For the magnanimous hearts, however, the entire earth is but a family.

The two keywords in this verse are: laghu-chetasām, which means narrow-minded or those with a limited, constricted consciousness, and udāra charitānām, implying one with a wide and expansive consciousness. Only to those who have a wide enough consciousness, does the whole earth feel like a family. As long as one is in a limited, narrow, ego-consciousness, a motto such as vasudhaiva kutumbakam remains, at best a mentalised ethical ideal that humanity should someday work towards, or at worst, an empty rhetoric to make oneself feel good by taking a moral high ground! One needs to gradually grow and expand in one’s consciousness to be able to see others as part of one’s being—that is the only way any dream of unity will be realised.

A true unity will not come easily, or simply by wishing, or by being politically correct. It will require sincerity and honesty, of intention, of action, of rising above the pettiness and the lowest tendencies of domination and control. Serious work will be necessary on all fronts—national, international, political, economic, social, cultural, educational. But most importantly, on the spiritual front, on the level of consciousness.

The life-affirming Indian “spiritual practicality” would insist on a change of consciousness as the basis for unity. It involves a gradual progression or shift away from the mind’s natural tendency to create binaries and divisions toward the more harmonising tendency of the deeper, the inmost part of our being—which is known as the psychic being in Integral Yoga—the chaitya purusha or the soul in Evolution.

Beloo Mehra
To Selfness

The Amitabha Buddha renounced his attainment of non-rebirth in order to work for the enlightenment of the humanity lying in ignorance. How did it happen? Evidently he had no desire left for himself. He had discovered that desire was the root of all misery and suffering, and the fire of his tapasya had burned up all desire, not only desire for himself but desire itself. When one is without desire one rises above selfishness and his acts in relation to others are spontaneously benevolent and free from the tint of selfishness. One has compassion for all without distinction, and has always the readiness to act out of it.

This compassion, this love for all beings, is something inconceivable to those who are clouded by the instinct of selfishness. It is in the reach of those who have a selfishness with others, a perception of oneself in others, a realisation of unity with others. The source of all is one, the self of all is one, all life is one. When this experience is firmly secured, then one attains to that state in which the basis of his acts in respect to others will be selfness, not selfishness, not otherness.

The feeling of otherness towards others, even without its effacement, can be highly remodeled and refashioned by a strong sense and effective practice of great tenets of morality and ethics. Benevolence, philanthropy, forbearance, love of all living beings, all have a place of importance in teachings through the ages. And we have brilliant examples of their achievement in life. But the sovereign instances are those in which the very feeling of otherness and separation has passed into that of unity and oneness. There is the warmth of sterling love and true service.

This conversion takes place by spiritual disciplines, by Yoga. For he who succeeds in Yoga succeeds in going beyond the bounds of his own individuality into the wide expanses of universality. Once the universal consciousness is attained, naturally the level of conduct undergoes a change and transfer into widening and enlargement.

The desire for personal salvation stands overcome by the vision of God in creation. Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter, “I have lost all wish for my salvation.” The famous verse of the Bhagavata Purana says, “I desire not the supreme state with all its eight siddhis nor the cessation of rebirth; may I assume the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them so that they may be made free from grief.” Astonishing results follow even in the physical, the material expression. There is the anecdote that speaks of the marks of injury on the back of a saint when an animal was flogged.

So one is called to move away from selfishness to identification with others, to feel and act for fellow beings as one does for oneself.

Shyam Sunder
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)

Uniformity and Liberty

Editor’s note: Uniformity does not imply unity, nor unity imply uniformity. 'Sri Aurobindo introduces the series The Ideal of Human Unity' with: “I intend to proceed very cautiously and not go very deep at first, but as if I were leading the intelligence of the reader gradually towards the deeper meaning of unity—especially to discourage the idea that mistakes uniformity and mechanical association for unity.” As we examine the principle of uniformity it is interesting to note its close connection with the principle of liberty.

For certainly there is or has been an immense drive towards uniformity of life habits, uniformity of knowledge, uniformity political, social, economic, educational, and all this, if followed out to its final conclusion, will lead naturally to a uniformity of culture. [...] (CWSA, 25: 412)

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[...] the struggle of order and uniformity against liberty has been the dominant fact of all great human formations and
developments—religious, social, political. There is as yet no apparent ground for predicting a more reasonable principle of development in the near future. [...] The principle of authority and order will attempt a mechanical organisation; the principle of liberty will resist and claim a more flexible, free and spacious system. The two ancient enemies will struggle for the control of the human unity as they did in the past for the control of the growing form of the nation. [...]
(CWSA, 25: 409-410)

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But freedom is as necessary to life as law and regime; diversity is as necessary as unity to our true completeness. Existence is one only in its essence and totality, in its play it is necessarily multiform. Absolute uniformity would mean the cessation of life, while on the other hand the vigour of the pulse of life may be measured by the richness of the diversities which it creates. At the same time, while diversity is essential for power and fruitfulness of life, unity is necessary for its order, arrangement and stability. Unity we must create, but not necessarily uniformity. If man could realise a perfect spiritual unity, no sort of uniformity would be necessary; for the utmost play of diversity would be securely possible on that foundation. [...] While the life-power in man demands diversity his reason favours uniformity. It prefers it because uniformity gives him a strong and ready illusion of unity in place of the real oneness at which it is so much more difficult to arrive. It prefers it, secondly, because uniformity makes easy for him the otherwise difficult business of law, order and regimentation. It prefers it too because the impulse of the mind in man is to make every considerable diversity an excuse for strife and separation and therefore uniformity seems to him the one secure and easy way to unification. [...] (CWSA, 25: 423-426)

Importance of Diversity

“The truth is neither in separation nor in uniformity. The truth is in unity manifesting through diversity.”

The Mother
(CWM, 14: 198)

Editor’s note: Today the word ‘diversity’, along with ‘inclusion’ (D&I), has become a global corporate buzzword. Organisations, through D&I initiatives, are acknowledging the importance of diversity by collectively putting their biases to rest and recognising that every individual is unique and has something to contribute irrespective of race, gender, colour or any other criterion. There might be dissatisfaction at the hollowness of corporate initiatives and in many cases D&I might be nothing more than PR display. Regardless, the fact that diversity has taken such a prominent role in the present day is a clear indication that mankind is becoming more supportive of individual freedom and rich variation in its self-expression. Sri Aurobindo emphasised greatly the role of diversity, especially in connection to unity and oneness; below are a few select passages.
Diversity in Unity

[...] In the life-type itself she [Nature] creates always the three terms of genus, species and individual. But while in the animal life she is satisfied to separate rigidly and group summarily, in the human she strives, on the contrary, to override the divisions she has made and lead the whole kind to the sense of unity and the realisation of oneness. Man’s communities are formed not so much by the instinctive herding together of a number of individuals of the same genus or species as by local association, community of interests and community of ideas; and these limits tend always to be overcome in the widening of human thoughts and sympathies brought about by the closer intermingling of races, nations, interests, ideas, cultures. Still, if overcome in their separatism, they are not abolished in their fact, because they repose on an essential principle of Nature,—diversity in unity. Therefore it would seem that the ideal or ultimate aim of Nature must be to develop the individual and all individuals to their full capacity, to develop the community and all communities to the full expression of that many-sided existence and potentiality which their differences were created to express, and to evolve the united life of mankind to its full common capacity and satisfaction, not by suppression of the fullness of life of the individual or the smaller commonalty, but by full advantage taken of the diversity which they develop. [...] 

[...] the real aim of Nature is a true unity supporting a rich diversity. Her secret is clear enough from the fact that though she moulds on one general plan, she insists always on an infinite variation. The plan of the human form is one, yet no two human beings are precisely alike in their physical characteristics. Human nature is one in its constituents and its grand lines, but no two human beings are precisely alike in their temperament, characteristics and psychological substance. All life is one in its essential plan and principle; even the plant is a recognisable brother of the animal; but the unity of life admits and encourages an infinite variety of types. [...] Therefore we see that in this harmony between our unity and our diversity lies the secret of life; Nature insists equally in all her works upon unity and upon variation. We shall find that a real spiritual and psychological unity can allow a free diversity and dispense with all but the minimum of uniformity which is sufficient to embody the community of nature and of essential principle. Until we can arrive at that perfection, the method of uniformity has to be applied, but we must not over-apply it on peril of discouraging life in the very sources of its power, richness and sane natural self-unfolding. (CWSA, 25: 422-425)

Diversity in Oneness

[...] Unity is an idea which is not at all arbitrary or unreal; for unity is the very basis of existence. The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature is moved to realise consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards and must one day realise.

But uniformity is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity; it insists that every group, every being shall be, even while one with all the rest in its universality, yet by some principle or ordered detail of variation unique. [...] 

[...] The peace, well-being and settled order of the human world is a thing eminently to be desired as a basis for a great world-culture in which all humanity must be united; but neither of these unities, the outward or inward, ought to be devoid of an element even more important than peace, order and well-being,—freedom and vigour of life, which can only be assured by variation and by the freedom of the group and of the individual. Not then a uniform unity, not a logically simple, a scientifically rigid, a beautifully neat and mechanical sameness, but a living oneness full of healthy freedom and variation is the ideal which we should keep in view and strive to get realised in man’s future. (CWSA, 25: 513-520)

Diversity of Language

The utility, the necessity of natural groupings may be seen if we consider the purpose and functioning of one great principle of division in Nature, her insistence on diversity of language. [...] 

Diversity of language serves two important ends of the human spirit, a use of unification and a use of variation. A language helps to bring those who speak it into a certain large unity of growing thought, formed temperament, ripening spirit. [...] On the other hand, it is a means of national differentiation and perhaps the most powerful of all, not a barren principle of division merely, but a fruitful and helpful differentiation. For each language is the sign and power of the spirit. [...] On the other hand, it is a means of national differentiation and perhaps the most powerful of all, not a barren principle of division merely, but a fruitful and helpful differentiation. For each language is the sign and power of the soul of the people which naturally speaks it. [...] Therefore it is of the utmost value to a nation, a human group-soul, to preserve its language and to make of it a strong and living cultural instrument. A nation, race or people which loses its language cannot live its whole life or its real life. And this advantage to the national life is at the same time an advantage to the general life of the human race. [...]
Modern India is another striking example. Nothing has stood more in the way of the rapid progress in India, nothing has more successfully prevented her self-finding and development under modern conditions than the long overshadowing of the Indian tongues as cultural instruments by the English language. It is significant that the one sub-nation in India which from the first refused to undergo this yoke, devoted itself to the development of its language, made that for long its principal preoccupation, gave to it its most original minds and most living energies, getting through everything else perfunctorily, neglecting commerce, doing politics as an intellectual and oratorical pastime, — that it is Bengal which first recovered its soul, re-spiritualised itself, forced the whole world to hear of its great spiritual personalities, gave it the first modern Indian poet and Indian scientist of world-wide fame and achievement, restored the moribund art of India to life and power, first made her count again in the culture of the world, […] (CWSA, 25: 514-518)

SRI AUROBINDO

World-Union

Editor’s note: In his writings Sri Aurobindo considers various possible forms of human unity before he presents one that will last. One can observe that mankind is slowly moving towards some form of world unity through science, technology and other external means, political and economic. These external devices can serve as intermediary steps, but, if relied upon as the only means will invariably lead to uniformity leaving no scope for a lasting unity. Sri Aurobindo emphasises on the possibility of a free world-union in the future led inwardly through a deeper understanding of a common goal or an inner growth of oneness. Here is an excerpt from Sri Aurobindo’s message for India and the world on 15th August 1947, the day of India’s independence, His 75th birthday:

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

SRI AUROBINDO

(CWSA, 36: 479-480)
Editor’s note: In August 1964, for the first World Conference of the Sri Aurobindo Society, the Mother gave a message and some questions for discussion by the conference participants, and her own answers (in italics).

The future of the earth depends on a change of consciousness.

The only hope for the future is in a change of man’s consciousness and the change is bound to come.

But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or if it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crashing circumstances.

So, wake up and collaborate!

* 

How can humanity become one?

By becoming conscious of its origin.

What is the way of making the consciousness of human unity grow in man?

Spiritual education, that is to say an education which gives more importance to the growth of the spirit than to any religious or moral teaching or to the material so-called knowledge.

What is a change of consciousness?

A change of consciousness is equivalent to a new birth, a birth into a higher sphere of existence.

How can a change of consciousness change the life upon earth?

A change in human consciousness will make possible the manifestation upon earth of a higher Force, a purer Light, a more total Truth.

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The World is a unity—it has always been, and it is always so, even now it is so—it is not that it has not got the unity and the unity has to be brought in from outside and imposed upon it.

Only the world is not conscious of its unity. It has to be made conscious.

We consider now is the time most propitious for the endeavor.

For, a new Force or Consciousness or Light — whatever you call the new element — has manifested into the world and the world has now the capacity to become conscious of its own unity.

25 March 1960

THE MOTHER

(CWM, 15: 60-62)

The Way Forward towards Human Unity

The saving power needed is a new psychological factor which will at once make a united life necessary to humanity and force it to respect the principle of freedom. The religion of humanity seems to be the one growing force which tends in that direction; for it makes for the sense of human oneness, it has the idea of the race, and yet at the same time it respects the human individual and the natural human grouping. But its present intellectual form seems hardly sufficient. The idea, powerful in itself and in its effects, is yet not powerful enough to mould the whole life of the race in its image. For it has to concede too much to the egoistic side of human nature, once and still nine-tenths of our being, with which its larger idea is in conflict. On the other side, because it leans principally on the reason, it turns too readily to the mechanical solution. For the rational idea ends always as a captive of its machinery, becomes a slave of its own too binding process. A new idea
A Dream — Auroville: A Living Experiment towards Human Unity

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities. Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of cooperation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race. To go into all that this implies would be too large a subject to be entered upon here; it is enough to point out that in this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas. But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.

Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way from the inner truth to the outer forms. Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent, — perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing, — the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.

SRI AUROBINDO
(CWSA, 25: 576-578)
be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one’s living but a way to express oneself and to develop one’s capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual’s subsistence and sphere of action. In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream.

And yet this dream is in the course of becoming a reality; that is what we are striving for in Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram, on a very small scale, in proportion to our limited means. The realisation is certainly far from perfect, but it is progressive; little by little we are advancing towards our goal which we hope we may one day be able to present to the world as a practical and effective way to emerge from the present chaos, to be born into a new life that is more harmonious and true. Bulletin, August 1954. (CWM, 12: 93-94)

Editor’s note: Later, on 28 February 1968 this dream manifested itself in the form of Auroville. The Mother envisioned Auroville as a universal township and gave a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of human unity. What better example can take its place to show how the idea of human unity is working its way in practice. For the inaugural ceremony of Auroville, the Mother read in French the four-point ‘Auroville Charter’ expressing the aspiration of the ideal city.

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.
2. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
3. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
4. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within,
5. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

February 1968
(CWM, 13: 193-194)

The Mother