

Practical Teachings of Sri Aurobindo & the Mother

a listen-along guide · 20 entries

AI distillations from Letters on Yoga & The Mother. Read the originals at sriarobindoashram.org.

ASPIRATION, REJECTION, SURRENDER

Aspiration — the Flame

In this yoga, everything begins with a simple movement of the heart turning toward the Divine. The Mother often spoke of aspiration as a flame rising quietly upward — not a fever, not a strain, but a steady fire that keeps burning even when nothing seems to happen. You do not need grand emotions. You need only a sincere call: a wish for the Light, for peace, for the Divine Presence, repeated day after day. When you sit quietly, let this longing rise gently, like a flame that does not flicker in the wind. If it dies down, kindle it again without discouragement. The strength of this path is not in how intense your feeling is on any single day, but in how faithful and constant your turning remains. Keep the flame lit. Let it be calm, patient, and true. That quiet, unwavering aspiration is what opens the door and invites the higher Force to come and work in you.

Rejection — Letting the Wrong Movements Go

Along with aspiration comes its companion: rejection. Sri Aurobindo described the seeker's work as the steady refusal of the movements that belong to the lower nature — desire, fear, anger, ego, and the restless demands of the vital being. Rejection does not mean fighting yourself with violence or hating what rises. It means noticing, calmly, when a wrong movement appears, and then quietly declining to give it your consent or your energy. When desire pulls, when fear whispers, when the ego wants to assert itself, you simply step back and say within: this is not what I want; I do not accept this. You need not wrestle it to the ground. Detach, refuse your sanction, and turn again toward the Light. Little by little, what you stop feeding loses its hold. This patient, watchful rejection clears the ground so that the higher nature can take root and grow within you.

Surrender — Giving Yourself and Your Works

The third labour, and the deepest, is surrender. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother taught that we are asked to offer ourselves — our thoughts, our feelings, our actions, our whole being — to the Divine, so that the Divine Force may take up the work of transformation. This is not passivity or giving up. It is an active, trusting consecration. You place your day, your tasks, and your difficulties in the hands of the Mother, and you let her Force guide and shape them. A simple way to begin is to offer each action as you do it: let this work be yours, not mine. When worry or the sense of a heavy personal burden returns, gently hand it back again. Surrender grows slowly, one sincere offering at a time. As you learn to give yourself, you find you are no longer carrying everything alone — a greater Power carries you.

Calling the Force

One of the most practical gifts of this yoga is that you are not asked to do it all by your own effort. Sri Aurobindo assured his disciples that above us there is a higher Force, the Mother's Force, ready to descend and work when we open to it. Our part is to aspire, to stay quiet, and to call. When a difficulty comes, or you feel dull, disturbed, or weak, do not merely struggle. Grow still, turn upward, and call the Force to come down and do what you cannot do yourself. Then remain open and let it work — do not pull at it or grow anxious about results. Often the change comes quietly: a settling of peace, a loosening of the knot, a new clarity. Keep the attitude of a calm receiver rather than a strained doer. As you practice this call and this openness, the Force becomes a living help you can lean upon each day.

Sincerity — the Quiet, Steady Heart

The Mother said again and again that sincerity is the one thing needful, the key that makes all the rest possible. To be sincere means that your whole being truly wants the Divine — not just the mind agreeing while the vital and the heart pull elsewhere. You cannot force this all at once, but you can be honest. Watch where you are divided, and quietly bring those parts, too, into the aspiration, asking that they also learn to want the true thing. And let your aspiration be steady rather than feverish. Sri Aurobindo counselled a calm, constant flame over bursts of excitement that burn out and leave discouragement behind. Do not measure yourself by dramatic experiences. Simply keep turning to the Divine with an honest heart, day after day, in success and in dullness alike. Sincerity that is patient and quiet will carry you further than any intensity. Stay true, stay steady, and trust the way.

THE PSYCHIC BEING

The Soul Behind the Heart

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak of a true soul within you, the psychic being, hidden deep behind the heart. It is not the surface person, not your passing thoughts or moods. It is a quiet flame that has always loved the Divine and always turned toward the good and the true. Most of the time it stays veiled behind the noise of the mind and the desires of the vital nature. But it is there, patiently waiting to come forward. To begin to feel it, simply grow quiet and turn your attention inward, into the region of the heart, with a sincere aspiration to meet your true self. Do not force anything. Call gently, sincerely, and let the answer come in its own time. As you keep turning inward, this inner soul begins to make itself felt, and slowly it becomes your true guide.

Turning Within

We usually live on the surface of ourselves, tossed about by thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the world outside. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that behind this restless surface there is an inner being, calm and steady. The practice is simple in idea, though it asks patience. Step back a little from the surface. Instead of being carried away by every thought and impulse, learn to watch them quietly, as if from a step behind. Turn your attention inward and downward into the heart, and aspire to find the true being that lives there. At first you may feel only a little more calm, a little more space inside. That is enough to begin. Keep the habit of returning within, many times a day if you can. As the surface grows quieter, the inner presence grows clearer, and you begin to live more and more from within, not merely from the surface.

Letting the Soul Take the Lead

It is not enough to feel the psychic being now and then. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother say the real change comes when this inner soul is allowed to grow and to govern the whole nature, the mind, the vital feelings, and the body. How does that happen in daily life? By giving it a chance to act. When you face a choice, pause and ask inwardly what the truest, purest part of you would want, not the part that seeks pleasure or ego, but the part that loves the Divine. Then try to act from that. Each time you choose the finer prompting over the lower impulse, the psychic influence grows stronger. Little by little it spreads through your nature, softening the hardness, purifying the desires, bringing light into the mind. This is slow, patient work. But every sincere choice lets the soul come a little more forward to lead.

The Still Small Voice

Within us there is a quiet inner guidance, what people sometimes call the still small voice. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother teach that the true prompting of the soul is calm, clear, and does not insist. Desire and imagination, on the other hand, are loud, restless, and pull you strongly one way. Here is a simple way to tell them apart. When an impulse rises, notice its quality. Does it come with agitation, craving, or a feeling of must have it now? That is usually desire. Does it come with excitement and vivid pictures of the future? That is often imagination. But the psychic prompting comes with peace, with a quiet certainty that asks nothing for the ego. So when you must decide, first grow still. Let the surface settle like water. Then the true voice can be heard beneath the noise. Trust the calm, clear, selfless indication, and gently set the agitated one aside.

The Signs of the Soul

How do you know when the psychic being is awake and active in you? The Mother points to certain clear signs. There is a spontaneous joy that does not depend on outer things going well. There is a natural gratitude that rises for no particular reason, a simple thankfulness to be alive and turned toward the Light. There is a quiet love and a warm turning to the Divine, an inner smile in the heart. And there is a longing for what is true and good, and a distaste for what is false or cruel. When you notice these moments, welcome them, dwell in them, let them last. Do not rush past them back into busyness. These are the soul making itself felt. The more you honor these movements and give them room, the more they become the steady background of your life, and the more your true being lives at the front.

WORK AS OFFERING

Offer the Work, Not Just the Result

Here is a simple way to begin the day. Before you start whatever is in front of you, the emails, the cooking, the meeting, pause for a moment and quietly offer it to the Divine. You are not asking to get something in return. You are simply saying, in your own words, let this work be done for You, through me. Then do it as well as you honestly can. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother taught that any work, however ordinary, becomes yoga when it is done in this spirit. It is not the size of the task that matters, but the attitude behind it. Washing a dish offered to the Divine is greater than a grand achievement done only for yourself. So keep the small remembrance alive. Offer the doing, keep doing your best, and let the work carry you a little closer to Him each time.

Do Your Best, Let Go of the Fruit

Do your best, and then let go of the fruit. This is the heart of Karma Yoga in daily life. We are used to working with one eye always on the outcome. Will it succeed? Will people praise me? What if it fails? The Mother said this constant hunger for results steals our peace and ties us in knots. The teaching is not to stop caring about your work. Quite the opposite. Give it your fullest care and skill. But once it is done, release your grip on how it turns out. The result is not really in your hands anyway. Success and failure both come and go. What stays with you is the spirit in which you worked. So put your whole heart into the doing, offer it up, and leave the fruit to the Divine. You will find you can work harder and worry less. That freedom is itself a taste of the yoga.

Become an Instrument

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother often spoke of letting the Divine Force act through you. It sounds lofty, but it begins very simply. As you work, quietly feel that you are not the sole doer. There is a greater strength that can flow through your hands and mind if you let it. So instead of straining with your small will, relax a little and call it in. You might say inwardly, work through me, use me. Then stay attentive and offered, like an open flute waiting for the breath. You still act, you still make the effort, but you are no longer carrying the whole weight alone. Over time you notice that when you step back from the ego and let the Force lead, the work often becomes clearer, calmer, and more true. This is how an ordinary worker becomes an instrument of the Divine, without leaving home or job at all.

Small Tasks Done With Care

The Mother placed great value on doing even the smallest work perfectly, as an offering. She said that nothing given to the Divine is unimportant, and that carelessness is a kind of disrespect. So the folded laundry, the tidy desk, the carefully written note, the meal prepared with attention, all of these can become part of your yoga. The secret is to bring the same love and exactness to the little things as you would to the great ones. Do not rush through them just to be finished. Do them well, because you are doing them for Him. This turns the whole day into practice. There is no longer sacred work and ordinary work, only work done consciously and work done in forgetfulness. Choose to do it consciously. When care and dedication go into every small act, the ordinary home and office quietly become a temple, and daily life itself becomes a path.

Equal in Praise and Blame

When we work, the results come in many shapes. Sometimes praise, sometimes criticism. Sometimes things go smoothly, sometimes they collapse. Sri Aurobindo spoke of equality, samata, as the steady inner ground of Karma Yoga. Equality does not mean you feel nothing or stop trying. It means you keep an even soul underneath whatever comes. When the work is praised, you do not get puffed up. When it is blamed or fails, you do not sink. You receive both quietly and offer both to the Divine. Try it in a small way this week. When someone compliments your work, take it calmly and give it inwardly to Him. When something goes wrong, meet it without collapsing, learn what you can, and offer that too. Little by little a peace grows that no result can shake. That peace is the true fruit of working as an offering, and it makes work itself a means of union.

EQUANIMITY AND FAITH

Even in Praise and Blame

This is samata, equality of soul, and it is the very ground of the yoga. People will praise you today and find fault tomorrow. Things will go well, and then they will go badly. If your inner peace rises and falls with all of that, you have no peace at all. So practice this quietly. When praise comes, receive it without swelling up. When blame comes, look at it calmly; take what is true, and let the rest fall away. When you succeed, do not be carried off your feet. When you fail, do not sink. Behind all these waves there is something in you that can stay steady, an equal quietness that belongs to the true being. Keep coming back to it. You are not asked to feel nothing; you are asked not to be tossed about. Little by little, that even calm grows, and on it everything else can safely be built.

A Quiet Faith

Shraddha, the Mother calls it, faith and trust, and it is not a loud belief you have to shout down your doubts with. It is a quiet turning of the heart that says, I trust that I am being led. You do not need to see the whole road. You only need to trust the One who is walking it with you. When the way is dark and you cannot feel any help, that is exactly when faith matters, because faith is not for the easy days. Say inwardly, whatever happens, the Divine is here, and the grace is real, and it is working even when I cannot see it. Do not demand proof before you trust; trust, and the proof comes quietly afterward, in its own time. This confidence steadies everything. It lets you act without anxiety and wait without despair. Keep the flame small if you must, but keep it lit, and let it grow.

Step by Step

The path is long, and it is walked one step at a time. Do not expect to be transformed all at once, and do not measure yourself against some perfect state you imagine you should already have reached. Progress in this yoga is slow and it is uneven; there are good days and there are falls. When you fall, the one real mistake is to lie there in discouragement telling yourself you will never get up. Sri Aurobindo said it plainly: the true difference is not between those who never fall, but between those who give up and those who rise again. So rise again. Get up quietly, without drama, without beating yourself, and take the next step. Patience is not passive; it is a strength. It is the willingness to keep going when results are slow, trusting that steady effort, repeated day after day, does its work underground long before you see the flower. Keep walking. That is enough.

Let the Thoughts Pass

The mind is restless, and you cannot quiet it by fighting it. Fighting only stirs it more. Instead, try this. Sit quietly and step back a little, as if you are watching your own mind from just behind it. The thoughts will keep coming; let them come. Do not grab them, do not argue with them, do not follow them down the road. Just watch them drift past, like clouds moving across the sky, while you stay as the wide sky behind. When you notice you have been pulled into a thought, gently come back, without irritation, and watch again. Bit by bit you will feel a quietness begin to settle underneath the noise. That inner silence is not empty deadness; it is a clear, receptive calm, and in it the higher help can reach you far more easily. Even a few minutes a day builds it. Do not strain. Be patient and quiet, and let the stillness grow.

Refuse the Gloom

The Mother was very practical about this: depression and gloom help you not at all; they only open the door to weakness, so refuse them. This is not pretending everything is fine. It is a discipline. When the grey mood comes and whispers that it is all useless, do not sit down and argue with it, and do not believe it. Quietly turn away, as you would turn from a bad companion. Stand up, do something simple and useful, breathe, and call inwardly for the light. Cheerfulness, a calm and confident gladness, is itself a kind of strength, and it keeps you open to help. So keep your face turned toward the sun. Open like a flower opens, quietly, upward, and let the higher Force come in. You do not have to manufacture the light yourself; you have only to stay open and let it work. Refuse the gloom, keep trusting, and the atmosphere clears.