

BOOK REVIEW: *The Mind of the Cells: or Willed Mutation of Our Species* by Satprem (1982)
Institute for Evolutionary Research

“Salvation is physical.”

That is a mantra of the Mother – disciple, companion, and co-worker of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry. For those who aren’t familiar, Sri Aurobindo was one of the most influential Indian spiritual figures of the 20th century. He and the Mother devoted their spiritual attention to pioneering and laying a path for the evolution of humanity to the next species – to a posited “supramental” level. This book is a collection and interpretation of conversations with the Mother, received and edited by her consort Satprem. It is a synthesis of the Mother’s most incisive thinking regarding “the mind of the cells” – and it is very powerful in its delivery.

“Salvation is physical.”

The key to this spiritual philosophy is that evolution does not/will not occur in some disembodied, exosomatic realm: “The next species is in the body. It is obvious. Unless it is experienced in the body, at the physiological or cellular level, it remains a translation into a foreign language” (p. 15). “[I]f evolution does exist at all, it must take place in matter, in *our* matter” (p. 35). “The work must be done in the body; the realization must be achieved here, in this physical world, otherwise it isn’t complete” (p. 165).

This perspective (if it is one) is so striking, so potentially revolutionary, transforming and liberating, because it is a direct contradiction to the entrenched and outworn Cartesian mindset which has forcefully asserted for hundreds of years that there is a distinct separation between ‘mind’ and ‘body,’ that mind doesn’t need body, or even doesn’t *need* a physical world for that matter. This Cartesian dualistic mindset has sanctioned and legitimated systematic despoliation and destruction of the physical world. Coupled with a Judeo-Christian-Muslim spirituality that envisions a perpetual disembodied after-life following this ‘just one’ earthly existence, then the body (anybody) – and by extension the Earth – becomes expendable, strictly utilitarian, exploitable. I’m beginning to wonder if this kind of spirituality, along with its associated eschatology of fire and brimstone, is a cynical expression of religious nihilism.

Then along come Sri Aurobindo and the Mother announcing: “The real change in consciousness will be the one that changes the PHYSICAL conditions of the world and makes it an entirely new creation” (p. 112). This could be translated as Heaven is (or will be) right here on Earth, or at least that earthly conditions surely could be (re)spiritualized. And how are these

changes to be realized? “[I]t is a power of material contagion, as if the fact of *living* the true (supramental) state... had the capacity to change the laws of the false, illusion-ridden matter we live in” (ibid). I interpret this “false, illusion-ridden matter” to be the legacy of the dark materialism of the past several hundred years – brought into stark relief, as it were, by Cartesian dualism and its resultant “positivist” science, culminating as it did in pernicious military-industrial capitalism.

Spiritualizing the Earth is possible because “[t]here is a consciousness in matter” (p. 113), and that consciousness can be influenced and transfigured by the directed spiritual consciousness of the evolved “supramental” mind of the new species (beginning of course with its incipient pioneering members). “Supramental consciousness imparts form to matter; it molds matter by sending out the appropriate vibration” (p. 62). I would think that matter could be influenced also by resonance and attunement, as a quality of consciousness is contagious. Salvation will come in “the world which must take the place of ours – not through a miracle: simply through a change of vibration in matter. The vibration of the true state cancels out all the false, illusory vibrations” (p. 122).

But before effecting change in the world, individuals must first evolve themselves – and this evolution must be experienced *in the body*, somatically. “It isn’t a higher consciousness imposing itself on the body; it is the body itself awakening to freedom in its cells: it’s a cellular freedom” (p. 134).

And therein lies the liberation; and with that liberation a welcome tactile responsibility: for no longer is salvation understood as the granting of privilege by some external, transcendent, disembodied deity, answering a fervent plea to ‘make it all better.’ Rather, salvation is effected right here, right now, in/with/as a body, taking full personal responsibility for one’s existence, one’s growth, and one’s accountability to the rest of Creation. The real spiritual work is, as the I Ching says, “taking over the work of evolution,” *becoming* the evolution itself, enlivening and vitalizing this beautiful body – and by extension this beautiful Earth – as a work of spiritual perfection.

““Salvation is physical;” there is no need to run off to other “spiritual” worlds. Redemption is on the earth and in this body” (p. 163). I suspect that is what Jesus was working on. After all, didn’t he ascend *in* a body, *with* a body, *as* a body?

The Mind of the Cells has induced a profound effect on my spiritual *noesis*. It has given me potent new language and imagery to enrich my thinking and writing. I am greatly inspired now to look further into the spiritual philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – what I perceive to be a sustainable healing epistemology for the third millennium.