

From Darkness To Light

A Journey Into Facilitation

An Interactive Monograph

Foundation Course for Facilitators

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From Darkness To Light

A Journey Into Facilitation¹

ALL of us are teachers in one field or another, in one sense or another - wherever one is in a position to influence others, where one has the opportunity to facilitate the other's learning and being - as a parent, as a teacher - yes, but also as an employer, as a supervisor, a colleague. Every day brings us opportunities to help or guide another person - whether a junior or a friend or a child.

To what extent are we conscious of our role as a teacher/facilitator? To what extent do we pause and reflect upon it and plan to make it a means for the other one's growth as well as one's own? How do we move beyond merely imparting a skill, a concept, an information, to touching an inner chord in the learner so that the learning is relevant in more ways than one? How do we develop those skills/attitudes in oneself which make such a facilitation possible?

Questions similar to these started me off on the 'Foundation Course for Facilitators'. I felt that my role was more than to be an encyclopedia for the students and that even the best of intellectual knowledge was powerless to put me in touch with the inner needs of the learner. I was essentially seeking to unlock a faculty within myself that would make me a channel for a higher wisdom than mine. In fact, I was in search of a method that would take me beyond the mind - into the precincts of the soul.

It is only as the course proceeded (over six months) that I gradually shifted my focus from facilitating students to facilitation at work (with my colleagues, over daily matters related to administrative and academic work) and then finally to facilitating myself first to overcome certain basic attitudes that actually impeded my road to true facilitation. Thus emerged the inner foundations of facilitation - a coming to grips with attitudes that help and attitudes that hinder.

This interactive monograph documents some of these along with exercises that you can undertake should you too wish to work on these lines. Though the context might vary, the essence, I believe, will remain the same for all of us. What is documented here is only the very first stage of the entire process that is ongoing and is on the threshold of emerging from working on oneself to working with others, i.e. from facilitating myself to facilitation at work, as well as facilitation with students.

The material for the monograph (readings, notes, exercises) is derived from the following main sources:

- The writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother
- The sessions facilitated by Ameeta Mehra at the Gnostic Centre, and her explanations as well as activities conducted by her
- Personal experience and reflection

Through a process of assimilation many of the words from sources outside oneself have become a spontaneous and natural part of oneself. But, wherever there is a clear demarcation, the source has been referred to in the footnote.

Asato ma sadgamaya

Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya

Mrityorma amritamgamaya

Lead me from Non-being to Being

(from Falsehood to Truth)

From Darkness to Light

From Death to Immortality

Guru - the Sanskrit word for the teacher who dispels darkness. Who can dispel darkness? Only she who lives in Light. The journey into facilitation is a progressive living in the light; a dispelling of darkness² in oneself as a preparation for the same in the student. The following outlines certain steps that one might take in this endeavour.

STEP ONE

THE GUIDING LIGHT: YOUR ASPIRATION

Re-viewing Facilitation

Reflective Questionnaire³

- Reflect back on your own learning - whether in school or at home or at the workplace or in the market or on a holiday - just anywhere and in any circumstance. When did you learn most? When did you enjoy learning most? When did you retain what you learnt - even till today? When was learning most meaningful to you? Reflect back on these experiences.

- What factors contributed to your learning in such a manner (so as to have the above effect on you)? What was it in the teacher (skills, knowledge, attitudes, approach, something else), what was it in the learning environment, what was it in the moment, what was it in you, what was it in the thing to be learnt - what was it that gave a meaning out of the ordinary to this particular learning?
- Based on your answers above, cull out the elements that truly facilitate learning - i.e. a learning that leaves a deep impact, a learning that lasts, a learning that is of a lasting value to the person concerned.

Perhaps if you were to share this list with someone else and they were to do the above exercise as well, together you might come up with more points - attitudes, qualities inherent in true facilitation. But, even on your own, you would have struck a chord and come closer to understanding what gives meaning to facilitation - which would be the same as what gives meaning to learning.

When we did this exercise as a group of students in the course: Foundation Course for Facilitators, we identified the following elements as common in all the answers:

- Interest
- Application (i.e. practical relevance)
- Inner need (to learn that particular thing)
- Environment (features such as silence, harmony, order, beauty, clarity)
- Facilitator (mainly through example, his/her own interest)

Further we reflected on what impeded true learning and thus came up with a list of don'ts for true facilitation. You may like to do the same - these might be opposites of what you wrote above or even something different:

- Reflect on all the other times when learning was without any joy or meaning. Or upon particular moments when learning was especially meaningless, a drudgery. What made it so? Reflect upon the attitudes of all those involved in the situation (including yourself) and the thing to be learnt and the circumstance.
- Keeping the above in mind, make out a list of factors that actually impede true learning.
- Having re-visited your learning moments - good and bad, what can you say about the impact such facilitations had upon your growth as a person? Note this down.

The Aim of Facilitation

An understanding of what is facilitation is intimately connected with why facilitation, i.e. what is the aim of facilitation. Here we are looking at an aim that goes beyond the mere utilitarian one

such as to teach a skill, to clarify a concept, to impart information, to get a work done, etc. This aim must have a relevance beyond the immediate or the short-term. It must be meaningful for the whole person rather than just one part of the person. It must strike an inner chord and correspond to an inner need of the learner. It must be something that brings him one step closer to his larger aim in life. Only then can it be in the nature of true learning, something of lasting value.

It is worth noting the aim of the Vedic seers, the original facilitators, as enshrined in the Invocation at the beginning of this essay: to lead from non-being to being (falsehood to truth), from darkness to light, from death to immortality - an aim which had the power to encompass all aspects of life and all the various levels of a person (physical, vital/emotional, mental, psychic and spiritual⁴). In fact the word for the ancient teacher was *Guru* - one who dispelled darkness, i.e. took away the veil of Ignorance and Inconscience from the soul and the outer members (mental, vital, physical).

This may not be the starting point for many of us, but any sincere urge for a facilitation of lasting value has to derive its essence from this very principle. In my case it was a perception of facilitation more as an attitude rather than a skill, as well as a need to function from an inner quietude of thoughts, preferences, inhibitions, desires and to receive from the founts of Wisdom above and beyond one's individual limitations so that the best could be effected for each student. What is it for you?

Reflective Questionnaire:

- Briefly outline your context - who are you facilitating, what is your relationship with them, in what context do you facilitate them, for how long have you been in this position, for how long will you continue (or expect to).
- What are your reasons for facilitation? Here, list out reasons at various levels - from the most mundane, circumstantial ones to those that you carry within you.
- What is the impact your facilitation has? How do the ones facilitated receive it? To what extent is it leading them from darkness to light?
- Reflect back on your life till now - from childhood to adolescence to youth and now. Can you recall any experience, however brief, of emerging into light - something that you experienced (rather than later intellectualised) thus? A time when you felt that you had somehow gained in inner strength and it had a lasting effect on who you were and how you dealt with life? Note this down in its essentials. (Alternatively, you could think of another person whose growth you witnessed and perceived him/her moving towards light.)

- What factors acted as the catalyst? Think of factors within you, in other person(s), in the circumstances. (Alternatively, the factors within that person, the people around him/her and the circumstances.)
- Reflect back once again on an experience where you have facilitated another's growth in any manner. Can you recall any time when you were the catalyst and facilitated another person to move towards light from darkness? What factors within you, the other person and circumstances, actually facilitated this process? Note down the experience and the factors responsible.
- Now, reflect upon your times of crises. Times when all seems to be breaking down. What has helped you to overcome these and arrive at a position of strength (not just living through the times and waiting for them to pass, but actively overcoming them)? Even if it was a person or persons, reflect further to touch that within them that came forth to help you out. Keep questioning, 'What was behind it? Was it their conviction, their determination, their love....? What gave them this conviction, this determination, this love? What was its source within them? Was it their mental make-up, their emotional nature? What made them thus?'
- Reflect back on your experiences as a facilitator. Anything that you remember with joy? What gives it that special character? Anything that you would rather not repeat? What factor is responsible for that?
- Now, reflect upon the above and define for yourself an aim that will bring a qualitative shift in your facilitation.

Understanding Facilitation as an Attitude

Creative Visualisation:

Sit down quietly and let yourself relax and become ingathered. And gently, gradually visualise yourself as a facilitator... the kind of facilitator that you would like to be. Actually imagine yourself into a situation of facilitation and make a note of the images that rise in front of your mind's eye. How do you see yourself - the way you look, act, interact - your entire state of being, both inner and outer? Visualise it in as much detail as you can. You might visualise certain settings, learning environments, activities - just take note of them for the present. How do you see your interaction with others? What qualities make it alive and meaningful? What are the attitudes that would make your facilitation of the kind you want it to be? Focus on these especially, and note these down. If anything else comes up, make a note of that as well.

Facilitation is essentially an attitude. You may have all the skills, you may have all the information required, and even expertise, but if something within you is not open to the urge for progress in the other, your facilitation will remain superficial, or even an imposition. It is your depths that have to respond to the same in the other, it is that frequency that has to match - the facilitation happens from there. For true facilitation one has to go beyond the mind, into the precincts of the soul, the psychic being, the *chaitya purusha*. Why is this required?

Well, what in you can dispel the darkness in you and in the other person? Through the mind, the light of the reason, you can gain clarity to some extent, but this clarity does not have the power to imprint itself over all your members - your emotions, your physical nature, your contrary thoughts and opinions. In itself it is impermanent; a stronger logic can shake it off its base, a contrary experience can set it in turmoil and doubt. The light of your noblest emotions can help you fight your weaknesses to some extent, but it does not permeate into the hidden crevices of your mind, your vital or physical nature. The emotions by themselves are helpless if the mind does not collaborate and impose the same on the rest of the members. Both the mind and the emotions, however noble in character, are subject to vagaries of life and fluctuate with experiences. Both have recesses that are hidden to our sight and rise up to take us unawares in sleep, or when we are fatigued or stressed in any way.

The only secure source of light can be that which is itself made from light, whose very substance is light. And that is where the *chaitya purusha* comes in, which in the Upanishads is described as the soul of man, no bigger than his thumb and is imaged as a pure flame rising upwards. It is the spark of the divine, enmeshed in matter, in order to lead matter back to the divine. It is the divine emissary sent on earth for this single mission, to lead man out of darkness towards light, and therefore it alone has the power to dispel the darkness of Ignorance and Inconscience in which man lives everyday. Not only this, its power is a power over life, not away from life. That is to say, it purifies from within outwards, making use of all our daily affairs as its tools. Its influence penetrates the mind and establishes in it gradually true knowledge that is unshakable. It penetrates the heart and the vital and establishes there true power and love that stand firm against all odds. It penetrates the physical and establishes there true peace that provides a firm basis for all other workings. Itself, it stands firm on a solid rock of faith, pointing upwards always.⁵

Thus, the first essential step in facilitation is to facilitate one's own growth - ideally, to come in touch with the psychic being within oneself and operationalise it in one's facilitation. A beginning towards this can be made by identifying those attitudes in oneself that are blocking true facilitation and those that are helping. This was what helped me move forward, once I had

understood that nothing will change in my facilitation till I changed myself. I came up against: Ambition, Hostility, Control. How did these impede the facilitation? Ambition desired appreciation, approval, supremacy and so it blocked any cooperative facilitation with another person as there would be elements of comparison, competition, envy, domination. It also led to a deviation from the focus of facilitation (to be a channel for a Higher Wisdom) as my focus would be on the students' response to me and the element of playing to the gallery would creep in. In work it meant one-upmanship. The need to control others or the circumstance blocked the free space of the student. In work it made me dominating, exclusive of anybody who would pose opposition to my way of doing things. Hostility towards what the other stood for created bitterness in work and strengthened the movements of exclusion, control. It created an environment of distrust and blocked constructive feedback. The attitudes that helped true facilitation became clear to me only after I had begun working on the blocks. These I identified as Trust, Love, Invocation.⁶ The next section (Confronting the Shadows) is about working on the attitudes that are creating blocks in your facilitation - essentially those attitudes that are even blocking your own growth as a person and are affecting all spheres of your life. Do you know what these are? You may list these before going further.

Identifying the Guiding Light: Your Aspiration

Before going further from this point, take some quiet time to come in touch with your own deepest or highest aspiration.⁷ There will be moments, days, weeks in your endeavour at self-perfection when the darkness will appear stronger, the will to overcome the defects will diminish, the routine and the norm will seem more inviting. At such times the light of your own aspiration will become your constant reference point to pull yourself up. It will remind you of the direction in which you wish to proceed, it will shed its light on your weakness and give you the hope and the will to march on.

Introspection:

Ask yourself what is the direction you want to take in your life, what is it that you really wish to achieve - in outer as well as inner terms, what is it that would give a lasting value to your life and bring you a deep satisfaction. You may arrive at the answer through an introspection or through a deep concentration. Try and fix upon an idea, an aim that has been with you for some time and has the power to encompass your smaller aims, something that is of a long term nature, something that has a relevance for all aspects of your life and for your entire growth as a person. What is it? Even if it be something that you feel might change or evolve further, it does not matter. Aspire for the highest that you can conceive today - that itself will lead you to the next step.

Now, relate your aim in facilitation to this larger aspiration. How can your aspiration give a deeper significance to your aim? How can your aim become a means for realising your aspiration?

Assimilation

Find a quiet time and go over all that you have written till now - from your very first meditation to the last one, and all the answers that you wrote, in response to the questionnaires, and any other reflections, visualisations. Does any pattern emerge? Make a note of all the points that you feel are relevant for going forward or as reminders to oneself. Make this the starting point for the next step.

STEP TWO

CONFRONTING THE DARKNESS: SELF-REFLECTION

Having identified the aspiration, the vision for yourself as a facilitator, you can now continue forth in your journey towards Light. Now is the time to take note of all that blocks your path - the shadows and dark shades within your own self. But this task must be done in the glow of the light, not in the grip of darkness. It is of utmost importance that one takes the attitude of a scientist, a discoverer or an explorer and does not get weighed down by the negativity one finds within oneself or gloss over it - both being signs of fear, an incapacity to face the truth. The following passages and exercises can be good starting points in this attitude.

Discovering a Hidden Treasure

“We should seek the company of the sage who shows our faults, as if he were showing us a hidden treasure.

- The Dhammapada

In all Scriptures meant to help mankind to progress, it is always said that you must be very grateful to those who show you your faults and so you must seek their company; but the form used here is particularly felicitous: if a fault is shown to you it is as if a treasure were shown to you; that is to say, each time that you discover in yourself a fault, incapacity,

lack of understanding, weakness, insincerity, all that prevents you from making a progress, it is as if you discovered a wonderful treasure.

Instead of growing sad and telling yourself, “Oh, there is still another defect”, you should, on the contrary, rejoice as if you had made a wonderful acquisition, because you have just caught hold of one of those things that prevented you from progressing. And once you have caught hold of it, pull it out! For those who practise a yogic discipline consider that the moment you know a thing should not be, you have the power to remove it, discard it, destroy it.

To discover a fault is an acquisition. It is as though a flood of light had come to replace the little speck of obscurity which has just been driven out.”⁸

Exercise: Your Treasure Trove:⁹

- All the previous exercises might have brought up certain attitudes in yourself that you can now put in your treasure trove as defects that hide a great light. As you proceed, your focus may change from day-to-day before you identify the central faults in your nature that need to be ironed out, and are actually behind most other weaknesses in you.
- Think of a person or persons who bring to light the weaknesses in you. What is your response to them? How do you feel at that time and later on? If you were to apply the above reading (Discovering a Hidden Treasure) in this case, what would you need to do differently and what implications would it have for your progress? It would help if you take up a real-life situation (preferably a recent one) where you were confronted with a weakness in your nature, and then apply the above reading to yourself.
- Next time you are faced with a similar situation, try and practise the attitude of ‘discovering a hidden treasure’. Make a note of its impact on yourself, the other person and the situation.

Self-Observation and Self-Organisation

Having taken the first step of acknowledging the negative movements within oneself, the next step too must be taken if one is to progress towards Light, and that is of understanding the point within oneself which supports the negativity and allows it to continue.

Assignment: Self-Reflective Journal:¹⁰

From now on make a habit of writing a self-reflective journal on a daily basis. Seemingly a very simple task, you will find that it requires the utmost sincerity to maintain regularity. In this journal you will record your highest aspiration and in its light go over your entire day and

inner movements to see for yourself how far you could progress towards your ideal during the day, and what kept you still in the darkness. Read the following passage to understand how this is to be done:

“One must be clearly aware of the origin of one’s movements because there are contradictory velleities in the being - some pushing you here, others pushing you there, and that obviously creates a chaos in life. If you observe yourself, you will see that as soon as you do something that disturbs you a little, the mind immediately gives you a favourable reason to justify yourself - this mind is capable of gilding everything. In these conditions it is difficult to know oneself. One must be absolutely sincere to be able to do it and to see clearly into all the little falsehood of the mental being.

If in your mind you go over the various movements and reactions of the day like one repeating indefinitely the same thing, you will not progress. If this reviewing is to make you progress, you must find something within you in whose light you can be yourself your own judge, something which represents for you the best part of yourself, which has some light, some goodwill and precisely is in love with progress. Place that before you and first pass across it as in a cinema all that you have done, all that you have felt, your impulses, your thoughts, etc.; then try to coordinate them, that is, find out why this has followed that. And look at the luminous screen that is before you: certain things pass by well, without throwing a shadow; others, on the contrary, throw a little shadow; others yet cast a shadow altogether black and disagreeable. You must do this very sincerely, as though you were playing a game: under such circumstances I did such and such a thing, feeling like this and thinking in this way; I have before me my ideal of knowledge and self-mastery, well, was this act in keeping with my ideal or not? If it was, it would not leave any shadow on the screen, which would remain transparent, and one would not have to worry about it. If it is not in conformity, it casts a shadow. Why has it left this shadow? What was there in this act that was contrary to the will to self-knowledge and self-mastery? Most often you will find that it corresponds to unconsciousness - then you file it among unconscious things and resolve that next time you will try to be conscious before doing anything. But in other cases you will see that it was a nasty little egoism, quite black, which had come to distort your thought. Then you place this egoism before your “light” and ask yourself: “Why has it the right to make me act like that, think like that?...” And instead of accepting any odd explanation you must search and you will find in a corner of your being something which thinks and says, “Ah, no, I shall accept

everything but that.” You will see that it is a petty vanity, a movement of self-love, an egoistic feeling hidden somewhere, a hundred things. Then you take a good look at these things in the light of your ideal: “Is cherishing this movement in conformity with my seeking and the realisation of my ideal or not? I put this little dark corner in front of the light until the light enters into it and it disappears.” Then the comedy is over. But the comedy of your whole day is not finished yet, you know, for there are many things that have to pass thus before the light. But if you continue this game - for truly it is a game, if you do this sincerely - I assure you that in six months you will not recognise yourself, you will say to yourself, “What? I was like that! It is impossible!”

You may be five years old or twenty, fifty or sixty and yet transform yourself in this way by putting everything before this inner light. You will see that the elements that do not conform with your ideal are not generally elements that you have to throw wholly out of yourself (there are very few of this kind): they are simply things not in their place. If you organise everything - your feelings, your thoughts, your impulses, etc. - around the psychic centre which is the inner light, you will see that all inner discord will change into a luminous order.”¹¹

Understand the principle behind the above passage - that of holding the light of the ideal in the front of your consciousness and passing your entire day in front of it. Depending on your own nature and mode, the shadow that you perceive might be in the form of an actual shadow, or a feeling of unease, a spontaneous recalling of the incident as something out of the ordinary, or in any other form. Do not brush anything aside with justifications or as too small to be jotted down. Especially do not let your mind interfere as you meditate thus upon your day. As you get into this habit, you will see that a certain stepping back takes place during the day itself and you start becoming conscious of your motives as you act or soon after you act. This gives you the power to do something about it there and then. Also, the very fact that you will be confronting yourself in the evening (journal writing time!), becomes a reminder to live up to the ideal during the day, so that the journal is more full of light rather than darkness. The importance of this daily self-reflection - especially in the written form - can be realised only after one has done it for some time. It is the one indispensable tool in one's journey ahead.

You may come across attitudes and strands in your being that do not seem to have a direct bearing on facilitation, at first sight. For instance, the quality of ambition or hostility towards a particular person who might not be anyone that you facilitate. But if these are attitudes that in any way have a bearing on your journey towards the Light, that are in any way strongholds

of darkness within you, be sure that they are deeply linked to your entire conduct as a facilitator. Find out what the link is, don't just brush these away - work on them. In fact, these might be the most important blocks on the path. Remember, it is not through the mind that you have to proceed (though you may utilise your mental faculties to gain more clarity or to get the better of the vital), but through the light of the psychic, that inner voice which knows.

The Games of the Mind and the Vital

You read above: "If you observe yourself, you will see that as soon as you do something which disturbs you a little, the mind immediately gives you a favourable reason to justify yourself - this mind is capable of gilding everything. In these conditions it is difficult to know oneself. One must be absolutely sincere to be able to do it and to see clearly into all the little falsehood of the mental being." Not only the mind, the vital too is full of tricks and makes use of the mind to give reasons in its favour. The mind and the vital together form a formidable veil that has to be pierced with the sword of sincerity if one is to glimpse even a little of the inner light. It is here that the inner feeling of disquiet, unease is of utmost help and importance. If you notice, whenever one does something that is not in harmony with one's nobler self, there is a moment or a tiny voice or sensation of unease within oneself - it is very quiet, may not be insistent at all, it is just there. This comes from the psychic and must be listened to, despite all the arguments of the mind and all the passionate insistence of the vital.

Self-reflection:

- As you write your self-reflective journal, especially focus on the way the vital or the mind come forth to make you act or continue to act in a particular way. Or how they come forth to prevent you from taking responsibility for certain actions, reactions, situations. Or from acknowledging a certain shadow in your being. Or the role they play in taking shadows for granted, as something others too have and so absolving you from any pressing need to do something about it. And in many other ways.
- The next time you are in a dilemma, observe the tug of pulls and pushes within you. Make a study of the reasons the mind puts forth and the preferences the vital displays. No matter how convincing your inclination towards a certain course of action seems, step back and check with yourself - is this the only way to accomplish this work well? or is it the most preferred way for you - due to habit, convenience, uncertainty, lack of knowledge, power conflict, hearsay or anything else. A good way to find out how attached you are to the solution is to imagine it happening and also imagine it not happening. What is your response

in both cases? Any response lacking an inner quietude (whether of joy or unhappiness) is a sign of your attachment to a particular option. You may or may not finally go ahead with this option - but at least now you can be sincere about your motives.¹²

Assignment: Self-reflective journal Summaries:

As the layers unfold to your sight, you will have to chalk out further steps to deal with what comes up.¹³ Different weaknesses may require different methods, and at different levels. Some measures might be purely at the physical level, others at the emotional or psychological levels, and still others at the level of aspiration and will. It would help if you went over your journal once a week and summarised the most significant movements - forwards and backwards, as well as outlined the next few steps as reminders for the coming week. These summaries will be of special help in maintaining a continuity in your endeavour while providing the stepping stone for the next step. They will also help you not to lose sight of your larger aim, your highest aspiration, your starting point and guiding light, as well as keep the objectivity alive in you. The next step of Walking in the Light will begin almost simultaneously, thus balancing the darkness from the very beginning and providing you with the inner support to overcome what blocks the path ahead.

Assimilation

It would a good idea to maintain a portfolio in which you file in all your work - the reflective questionnaires, the exercises, introspections and visualisations, as well as the journal summaries. This will become a tool for your assimilation. Make it a habit to go over this material once every month - it is sure to give a fresh impetus to your endeavour and bring to light certain points that with time you may have neglected rather than overcome. It will also be a source of strength as a record of the progress you have made.

STEP THREE

WALKING IN THE LIGHT: REMEMBER AND OFFER

“It is necessary to observe and know the wrong movements in you; for they are the source of your trouble and have to be persistently rejected if you are to be free.

But do not be always thinking of your defects and wrong movements. Concentrate more upon what you are to be, on the ideal, with the faith that, since it is the goal before you, it must and will come.

To be always observing faults and wrong movements brings depression and discourages the faith. Turn your eyes more to the coming light and less to any immediate darkness. Faith, cheerfulness, confidence in the ultimate victory are the things that help, - they make the progress easier and swifter.”¹⁴

Let these words from Sri Aurobindo be the starting point for turning your eyes to the coming light, with a sufficient knowledge of the darkness that you turn away from. Till now we have reflected on the difficulties in one's nature and attitudes that impede facilitation. Now it is time to identify what will help you to truly facilitate and how are you going to develop it.

Finding the Key to Operationalising a Positive Inner State

What is that one attitude or inner state that would make powerless the central fault in your nature? For instance, if I hold ambition as the central flaw in my nature, the attitude of self-giving will negate the hold of ambition. What is the key to operationalising this positive attitude/inner state in you? For instance, in order to form the habit of self-giving, it helps me to have Harmony as my aim in collective work.

There are many situations when there is a difference of opinion, when one's view is at stake, when a decision has to be taken. I noticed that even in seemingly insignificant matters (what should be cooked for lunch today? which particular music should be played? which book should be taken up for study? and so on) a tightness crept in. I experienced it physically, emotionally and mentally - a gesture of holding on with a tight grip, a refusal to let go or to widen or be receptive. It became supremely important to be listened to. The mind coated it with enhancing the importance of the decision out of proportion, the vital felt aggrieved and believed that only itself was sincerely thinking of the good of the organisation and the work in hand, all the others were - or at least the person I was colliding with was rationalising preferences and passing them off as carefully thought out reasons. And what was the result? Either a fight, heated words, bitterness or domination on one side and silent rebellion on the other, unhappiness, bitterness. Relationships suffered, work suffered and I always ended up with days of depression.

Why did it have such an effect on me? Because the tightness was not an ordinary movement in my case. It emanated from the central fault in my nature - ambition. And as I was trying to work on overcoming this very thing, any giving in produced a violent reaction. So, how

could I overcome it? In my case the key has been the ideal of Harmony and the attitude of Faith. Harmony is not to be confused with keeping quiet and letting things be on the surface while inside the disagreement festers. No. It is an active state, as explained by The Mother:

“The important thing is to find the point on which you can all agree - and after this is firmly established, each one must be ready to yield his personal will in order to keep intact this point of harmony.”¹⁵

“When we have to work collectively, it is always better to insist, in our thoughts, feelings and actions, on the points of agreement rather than on the points of divergence.

We must give importance to the things that unite and ignore, as much as possible, those that separate.

Even when physically the lines of work differ, the union can remain intact and constant if we keep always in mind the essential points and principles which unite, and the Divine Goal, the Realisation which must be the one unchanging object of our aspiration and works.”¹⁶

Thus what I started doing was the following:

1. Listening to the signals my body, vital and mind gave in such a situation - i.e. acknowledging the tightness there and then.

2. Acknowledging that it was a wrong movement in me.

3. Reminding myself of the aim in collective work: Harmony and warning myself of the consequences that I knew would follow if I did not act differently.

4. Slowing down. Just releasing the clutch on the argument or the point of view or the decision - through a movement of widening within. Withdraw from the discussion inwardly.

5. Trying to see the thing from the other's perspective or just being receptive to the other's point of view - 'what is the harm in trying?'

Even when I could do all this, there was still one hitch. The mind and the vital said: 'But won't the work suffer?', because there were times when the opposite view still seemed immature, even after detaching from the argument. Also: 'The other too is acting out of preferences so how will it help us work in true harmony if I just give in?'. It is here that Faith stepped in. Faith in a Higher Wisdom, the Divine Grace overseeing our work and collective endeavour. Faith that what was required at the moment was letting go and allowing space to the other rather than a mental or moral weighing of right and wrong. Faith that all will turn out for the best in the end. And truly, repeatedly I saw (and continue to do so almost once every day) that time either

proved the other person right or brought them around to my point of view or brought us to a more integral point of view - but in all cases it was done without any bitterness or quarrel. The result was not only a betterment of work but also a greater trust and intimacy between the two contenders, besides personal growth.

Reflective Questionnaire:

- What is that one attitude or inner state that would make powerless the central fault in your nature?
- What is the key to operationalising this positive attitude/inner state in you?

The next step obviously is to try it out – in real life situations. You may begin by becoming more conscious in the especially difficult situations – the ones that evoke the most negative response from you. It is here that the efficacy of your insight will be tested.

Assignment: Experimentation:

- Think through how will you apply this key in real-life situations.
- Experiment with it at least once every day to begin with.
- Record your trials, errors, progress in your self-reflective journal.

The Chief Discipline: Remember and Offer

However powerful, an occasional remembrance, a sporadic meditation, an inconstant rejection, an intermittent aspiration are not sufficient to sustain the momentum of self-change. Everybody makes good-willing resolutions which one later forgets or is too weak-willed to implement. It is not enough to touch the peak once in a while - at least not if one wants to lead others to it.

To continue to walk in Light, perhaps nothing is as simple and as powerful as the brief injunction by The Mother: ‘Remember and Offer’. Till now I have mainly talked about methods where mind has been the chief agent for initiating the change. But this is not sufficient if what one is battling with is so deeply ingrained that it comes up in all kinds of guise. Then one has to call in the power of the Divine Grace – through prayer, through remembrance, through meditation, through offering – because the Grace is like a laser beam that penetrates deep into the hidden recesses of the being where mind cannot reach and works tirelessly, ceaselessly to dissolve the knots. When the mind is asleep or unwilling or incapable, inconsistent, the Grace is there to carry on regardless of all obstacles. If one can take a constant attitude of remembrance, i.e. remembrance of one’s aspiration, remembrance of one’s true potential and urge for progress,

remembrance of one's ability to overcome, remembrance of the Divine guiding your life, the offering will be spontaneous. But it takes a long time before one can develop the attitude of remembrance as one is too caught up in the usual modes of functioning and the outer life. One has to consciously develop the habit of detachment, an inner quietude in action, objectivity.

A settled peace and quiet in the mind, body and emotions is the first condition for any lasting work of changing one's nature. It is this peace and quietude that give you the ability to be detached and objective about your own nature and thus gives you as well the power to act upon it. It is the peace and quietude in you that hold you firm in your resolve and help you to concentrate on your aim and aspiration. Peace within oneself brings clarity and concentration to the mind, strength and quiet joy to the vital and true rest in the physical. Peace within oneself is the starting point for any true action. Check out this truth for yourself, but do not confuse peace with inertia or a 'doesn't matter, anything will do' attitude. True peace has an invincible strength inherent in it. Establish this peace within you, in action.

Meditation: Establishing Peace in the Mind:¹⁷

“How can we establish a settled peace and silence in the mind?”

First of all, you must want it.

And then you must try and must persevere, continue trying. What I have just told you is a very good means. Yet there are others also. You sit quietly, to begin with; and then, instead of thinking of fifty things, you begin saying to yourself, “Peace, peace, peace, peace, peace, calm, peace!” You imagine peace and calm. You aspire, ask that it may come: “Peace, peace, calm.” And then, when something comes and touches you and acts, say quietly, like this, “Peace, peace, peace.” Do not look at the thoughts, do not listen to the thoughts, you understand. You must not pay attention to everything that comes. You know, when someone bothers you a great deal and you want to get rid of him, you don't listen to him, do you? Good! You turn your head away (*gesture*) and think of something else. Well, you must do that: when thoughts come, you must not look at them, must not listen to them, must not pay any attention at all, you must behave as though they did not exist, you see! And then, repeat all the time like a kind of - how shall I put it? - as an idiot does, who repeats the same thing always. Well, you must do the same thing; you must repeat, “Peace, peace, peace.” So you try this for a few minutes and then do what you have to do; and then, another time, you begin again; sit down again

and then try. Do this on getting up in the morning, do this in the evening when going to bed. You can do this... look, if you want to digest your food properly, you can do this for a few minutes before eating. You can't imagine how much this helps your digestion! Before beginning to eat you sit quietly for a while and say, "Peace, peace, peace!" and *everything* becomes calm. It seems as though all the noises were going far, far, far away (*Mother stretches out her arms on both sides*) and then you must continue; and there comes a time when you no longer need to sit down, and no matter what you are doing, no matter what you are saying, it is always "Peace, peace, peace." Everything remains here, like this, it does not enter (*gesture in front of the forehead*), it remains like this. And then one is always in a perfect peace... after some years.

But at the beginning, a very small beginning, two or three minutes, it is very simple. For something complicated you must make an effort, and when one makes an effort, one is not quiet. It is difficult to make an effort while remaining quiet. Very simple, very simple, you must be very simple in these things. It is as though you were learning how to call a friend: by dint of being called he comes. Well, make peace and calm your friends and call them: "Come, peace, peace, peace, peace, come!"¹⁸

The light that one aspires to reach is also within oneself - in the form of the psychic being. But our consciousness is so outwardised that we are hardly even aware of this resource within us. Therefore, meditation is an indispensable tool to inwardise our consciousness and explore the inner, deeper and higher regions invisible to our outer eyes. Through meditation we can come in touch with the truth of our own being and the world around us and the divine. Meditation provides us with an inner space in which to be quiet, to reconnect with one's inner being, to come in touch with one's deepest aspiration, to remember and to offer. And meditation can be of different kinds, for different natures, for different aims. Dynamic meditation is a meditation of self-transformation - a meditation that has the power to change one's nature. If one does it sincerely, the effect is stupendous and far-reaching. Even deeply entrenched attitudes can be unprised and thrown out of one's nature. It is an important aid in one's endeavour to walk in the light.

Meditation: Dynamic Meditation:¹⁹

"There is another kind of meditation which consists in being as quiet as one can be but without trying to stop all thoughts, for there are thoughts which are purely mechanical

and if you try to stop these you will need years, and into the bargain you will not be sure of the result; instead of that you gather together all your consciousness and remain as quiet and peaceful as possible, you detach yourself from external things as though they do not interest you at all, and all of a sudden, you brighten the flame of aspiration and throw into it everything that comes to you so that the flame may rise higher and higher, higher and higher; you identify yourself with it and you go up to the extreme point of your consciousness and aspiration, thinking of nothing else - simply, an aspiration which mounts, mounts, mounts, without thinking a minute of the result, of what may happen and specially of what may not, and above all without desiring that something may come - simply, the joy of an aspiration which mounts and mounts and mounts, intensifying itself more and more in a constant concentration. And there I may assure you that what happens is the best that can happen. That is, it is the maximum of your possibilities which is realised when you do this. These possibilities may be very different according to individuals. But then all these worries about trying to be silent, going behind appearances, calling a force which answers, waiting for an answer to your questions, all that vanishes like an unreal vapour. And if you succeed in living consciously in this flame, in this column of mounting aspiration, you will see that even if you do not have an immediate result, after a time something will happen.”²⁰

Assignment: Meditation:

Make some time everyday for meditation. If it is difficult for you to start off on your own, take the help of the audio-cassettes or join a session to learn how to meditate.²¹

Assimilation

As you review your journal summaries and the portfolio, you might see that your preoccupations are no longer the same – what took away maximum energy from your mind and vital (the central flaw in your nature) when you began is no longer a major issue but something that seems mapped out, identified and controlled. It might not have gone but it is no longer like a wild beast taking you by surprise every other day. This does not mean that it is unimportant now, but now you can take the next step and work on your attitudes in facilitating others.

STEP FOUR

TO FOLLOW THAT STAR:

THE BEGINNING OF TRUE FACILITATION

In the beginning I had identified three focus areas: facilitating students, facilitating at work and facilitating myself. Of these, the core was facilitating oneself. This never stops but now the other two have to be integrated more consciously. In the last few weeks, I notice a shift in my facilitation of students. The beginning has been made to plan differently and to execute differently. The following (given as an exercise) has been the framework that has helped remembrance and offering, as well as actual planning and execution.

Facilitating Students

It is only when Facilitation becomes a means for your inner growth that it will have its full relevance for you and evoke a sincere effort on your part. As long as it is something routine, a chore to be done, or even a preferred activity but more in the nature of a performance where you are the giver and others are at the receiving end, it will not work. So, the first shift is to connect inwardly to Facilitation and set aims for yourself when you plan for the students or colleagues at work. These aims should be such that help you work on your own attitudes as identified till now.

Exercise: Planning & Evaluation:

- Before you begin to plan, Remember and Offer – reconnect to your aspiration and the next step that you wish to take in your own progress. Try and plan from an inner quietude.
- Whatever the nature of your next facilitation, plan out aims for yourself in attitudinal terms. You have already identified what attitudes help you to facilitate better and you also know the blocks that might come up. Consciously set out the mode through which you will facilitate so that the session is as much of a learning experience for you as for those whom you facilitate.
- For the rest, do not give up on all your other faculties of planning your best for the students, depending on what the situation demands.
- Also visualise the learning environment – what kind of ambience in the physical will facilitate your growth and those of the students? It is not enough to plan out activities and resources. If you have attitudinal aims, the right environment must be created for these.²²

- Once you have finished planning, sit back and once again offer the whole thing to the Divine Grace – invoking the light of Silence to reveal the gaps.
- Before you begin the session, invoke the Presence to guide you. And then jump fully into it – but still with an inner quietude.
- At the end of the session (and if possible during it), evaluate yourself against your personal aims. To what extent were you able to achieve them? What helped? What came in the way? What do you need to do differently the next time?

Facilitation at Work

This still remains a difficult area for me and requires further introspection as to what actually creates problems - they might be attitudes arising from the central ones only, but at present they need to be tackled also in themselves. Till now, the following have come up (as you read, reflect upon whether these also exist in your organisation and whether these exist in you):

- Tendency to Control events, planning, execution, people, information: This is an attitude which says, 'Everything should go my way. People should depend on me for information (so let me make the files inaccessible or difficult to use or restrict access). Let me be the most important person in any event management.' Coupled with other attitudes (manipulation, hostility, distrust, for instance) it can take a guise totally opposite. This is how it would happen: during the planning stage I would pretend to be obedient, going along with the decisions taken. Even if I opposed any idea, I would not say it and camouflage it to myself as an endeavour at Harmony! But later, when it came to execution, the same disagreement and preference would resurface and colour my actions. I would not put in my best into what was decided. All kinds of 'valid' reasons would surface why that could not be done even though 'I had tried my best'. And so naturally 'my plan' had to be put into action, 'for the sake of the work'. You see, how easy it is! But I have been lucky. I am surrounded with people who can see through me and the nature of the work is such that the slightest falsehood in any of us is soon brought to light through group dynamics, impediments in the work. But, the work on getting rid of this has to be done by oneself nevertheless. In an organisation where falsehood is accepted as the norm, the challenge would be firstly to discover and acknowledge that such a trait exists and that the work can actually be better without it - for, often the justification offered is that the organisation and the individual cannot compete, cannot exist in 'the outside world' unless they do all this (including the other attitudes listed below). Is this really so?
- Attitudes of Exclusion and Division: An attitude that works on the principle of 'divide and rule'. Stemming from a lack of confidence, from insecurity and a lack of trust in others, it is

a tool used by the wish to control, the ambition for power over people, the desire for self-importance. This comes up in me when I fear an input which might upset my neatly laid plans and preferences or force me to exert myself more - this means that I exclude certain people from my facilitations - neither do I share my planning with them, nor do I welcome them to observe the session and give a feedback. It also surfaces when I see certain people forming closer bonds with each other and I myself feel excluded from that relationship or fear that my importance in the dynamics will diminish. Mostly the manifestation of these attitudes is very subtle - I myself become aware of it only on reflection or through mirroring by others. Do you recognise this in yourself?

- Resistance to certain works: Reaching out for subscriptions, for enrollments to workshops and courses, for advertisements - this has been a major area of resistance for me. It is not the resistance itself that created so much problem as not acknowledging it. I would delegate it to others, saying, 'Oh, I am so busy, I have to work at the computer, I need to be at the Centre, they can go around.' I would feel I had done my part, I was involved. But delegation means that should the work not happen or fall short, you have to step in yourself. That I was not willing to do as there was an intrinsic resistance to the work itself. So, this is a good gauge to find out where one actually carries a resistance. Just imagine yourself stepping in and doing that work - if there is a resistance you will immediately feel it in yourself even at this stage. In work, how can one delegate, or facilitate another's execution of it if one has a resistance to that work oneself? As a facilitator one has to inspire and enthuse, which means one has to be inspired and enthusiastic oneself first.

The list can go on²³ and it would have done so had not another factor stepped in - something so unexpected that one would normally not relate it to learning to be a facilitator - THE SETTING OF TARGETS AND BOTTOM-LINES IF ONE FAILS TO MEET THE TARGETS. I was all set to work on these attitudes one by one, prepared for the long and slow march ahead. I had not expected that real facilitation at work will begin for a long time to come. But during the planning for the next year, we were asked us to set targets in concrete terms (not attitudinal or as endeavours but as tangible results in terms of numbers - how many subscriptions, how many memberships, how many sales, how many enrollments, how many advertisements, etc.) and also to set a bottom-line that would be a personal sacrifice in case one was unable to meet the targets. Initially there was a great resistance to fixing any bottom-line and this brought me up face to face with how afraid I was of taking responsibility, how unsure of achieving anything. It also showed a lack of faith in the Divine help. Therefore it was important to set a bottom-line that would be a real

sacrifice so that it could act both as a motivation to achieve and as an impossibility that was anyway not going to happen because the targets would definitely be achieved - bringing in certitude, determination, invocation, cooperation with others, clear focus, organisation, discipline, responsibility. The whole preoccupation with one's shortcomings is replaced with a concentration on the aims of the organisation and one's own potential as well as responsibility in fulfilling these. The targets are such that they leave no time for pettiness or resistance. Thus work itself becomes a means to learn facilitation.

As the new year begins, this is where I am... looking forward to achieving all my targets and experiencing the joy of achievement for a larger purpose as well as the joy of giving oneself to the work totally with full faith in the result. This I sense to be the next step in my journey into facilitation as the achievement of the targets demands attitudes that are the foundation of facilitation - Silence, Receptivity, Offering; Love, Trust, Invocation; Discipline, Harmony, Responsibility. But one must not forget that it is the work that has gone before into building up the inner foundations that has made me ready to take on the outer challenge and use it for further inner work. This is a cycle that must continue.

Appendix 1

Attitudes of a True Facilitator: The Light and the Shadow

The Aspiration: To be a True Facilitator (Introduction)

Silence-Receptivity-Offering... these three words offered the key to the closed door confronting me in my search for true facilitation. I had reached a point of being afraid to facilitate. I was afraid of falling back upon my experience and expertise gained over 10 years of facilitation; afraid of the convenience of continuing to operate from the same rut - that of the mind and the ego. Gradually an understanding had dawned upon me that such a facilitation was hollow. It had all the trappings of a 'good facilitation' but the discerning eye and heart knew that it could take one only this far and no further. It was impotent to open the student to his own depths and to the ranges above. It was constrained to move within the grooves set by the facilitator. It was the old order and it needed to go.

I came to this course feeling that I had all the skills but the right attitudes were missing. How to be a channel of a Higher Force, a Purer Intention, a Perfection seeking to express itself in facilitation? Therefore, the three words: Silence-Receptivity-Offering. A facilitation arising out of an inner quietude of thoughts and desires; receiving from the founts of Wisdom above and beyond one's individual limitations; offering the whole process of facilitation to the Divine Intention, so that the best could be effected for each student.

Five days at Binsar and one miserable experience of facilitation opened me to further intricacies. Somehow I had opted to facilitate 'Absolute Unified Surrender' for the rest of the group, as part of a course assignment. But as I proceeded with it I felt ill at ease and totally false at attempting to facilitate something that I myself had not practised. Other issues of being tied up in one's own image and past, ambition to be acknowledged a good facilitator, carrying out the whole thing as a task to be done, ambition to carry it out at a level beyond one's present grasp - these came up as well. It was clear that something was drastically wrong. Simple sincerity was missing. The expert had smothered the learner.

Back in Delhi, this understanding deepened and the attention began shifting away from facilitating others to facilitating oneself. It also became clear that my immediate focus was not going to be students, but the others with whom I worked in close proximity every day. I tried carrying out daily facilitations at work. It failed. It was brought home that for me the next step

was only to focus on my attitudes and facilitate a change in my nature as soon as possible, only then the next door was going to open to me.

And so began the self-reflective journal and the weekly summaries (a course requirement). Week after week layers opened, revealing the shadow and the light in oneself. Most of these were not new, but the discipline was lacking - even to acknowledge them, forget about working on them. The daily self-confrontation forced the focus to be where it was most required - on one's own nature. But 24 hours is a long period to forget and to slip back most easily into patterns of behaviour and responses one is accustomed and attached to. The stage where I am today is just a beginning. I have been shown the carrot, but it is not going to come without the stick, and I have to apply that stick. The day I forget, it is difficult to face oneself. The pain increases with each careless act. That is a relief, because it is this pain that will be the goad to move ahead - for *tamasic* natures such as mine. As The Mother says, there is a sunlit path as well - something that comes easily when one is in Pondicherry - where the joy of walking in the light wells up spontaneously and dissolves the shadows and one wonders how was it that one had identified with them. This is the state that I aspire for - to be in contact with the psychic, the source of all light in one's being. And so the journey is through the shadows and through the light, into the light. The aspiration comes and goes, and has to be supported and nurtured through a discipline.

This monograph records some of the findings in this process and outlines certain basic hurdles and supports on the way.

The True Facilitator

From teaching to facilitation had been one leap that I had taken during my first few years in education. Facilitation had meant helping the child learn on his own - 'learning by discovery', observing the child, empathising with her learning and growth needs - not as one unit in a collective mass, but as a unique individual, building up a close emotional and intellectual bond with the child, being open to learning along with the child, and so on. There had been a focus on developing the child's thinking processes, inculcating lifeskills, developing certain attitudes and encouraging self-reflection. But this was just the outer crust. When I viewed the aims of Integral Education - the only educational philosophy that satisfied my inner sense of the dynamic role education must play in an individual's growth - I felt as if I had not even begun. Four statements of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother hinted at the nature of the work to be done:

1. When asked to define 'Free Progress', The Mother had responded: "A progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas."

2. In his essay on 'The Human Mind', Sri Aurobindo outlines the 3 principles of true teaching:

"The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught."

"The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth."

"The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be."

Behind these 4 sentences, I could sense only one way forward - that of the soul or the psychic being. The key to helping the child develop integrally, the key to helping the child discover her '*swadharma*', the key to helping her be true to her essential '*swabhava*' and fulfil her purpose on earth, lay in facilitating the child's inner growth along with that of the outer instruments. But this was not possible until the teacher had experienced a similar growth herself. Did that mean that one had to focus on one's own growth and withdraw from teaching? Not necessarily. There was another way open. Yes, the journey had to begin with oneself, but if one could learn to be a channel of the Divine Intention which had sown the purpose in each one of us as a soul spark and which knew exactly how each individual was to develop, then one could continue with facilitation from an inward stance. One would still make use of the information, knowledge, skills one had as a teacher, but these would be put at the service of something beyond one's own limitations and predilections. It would lead to an unbiased facilitation, which would be much more powerful and effective. This I sensed to be a 'true facilitation'.

Confronting the Shadows

Intellectually I knew all this, yet I was unable to move ahead. This course provided a framework, a guiding and supporting hand, a collective impetus to do so. The first thing to come up were the Shadows - attitudes that impeded all good intentions, that perverted all facilitation. The biggest on the list was Ambition. Analysis and self-reflection revealed the following:

- Ambition was the driving force for facilitation. By its very nature ambition is a movement of self-aggrandisement at the cost of others. This meant that there could be no cooperative facilitation. If I had to facilitate a session along with another, there would be competition, comparison, jealousy, envy, pride, superiority, inferiority - in one word, ill-will. If the other was a doormat, it would be tyranny and control. If the other was an equal, there would be a tussle for domination. If the other was superior, there would be self-negation, pretense.
- Ambition desired results - mainly in terms of appreciation and admiration. This led to exercising control (mostly subtle) over the student. It also led to mercurial shifts in temper. All through the session the attention would be on the response (as perceived, not necessarily

real) of the students to one's personality and nature of facilitation, not on the inner need of the student and definitely not on being a channel for the Higher Wisdom. In fact, this was one of the main factors for the crash of the Binsar facilitation.

- Joy was absent from facilitation. Joy could exist only if the facilitation was sincere, simple and spontaneous. A calculating facilitation was too fraught with anxiety and tension to experience the joy of being in that moment.
- When applied to work (facilitation at work), it meant that the work suffered - it became subservient to one person's need for attention, appreciation, obedience. And it created inequality, division, dissension.
- Ambition also meant that one refused to take risks and move ahead - for that involved fear of failure and there was a need for 'success'. Thus the organisation suffered.
- The most dangerous of all was the 'spiritual ambition', which served as a cloak to hide all other forms of ambition in the garb of 'being advanced on the path', and hence beyond questions from certain people at least. It also distorted the genuine aspiration to be close to the Divine as proximity to the Divine became a currency one could use to buy oneself awe and admiration.

It was clear that this one knot was the undoing of all good intentions. How could one progress as long as this was there? How could one be sincere to one's own aspiration? How could one move even one step towards the psychic being when during the day there were innumerable steps one was taking away from it? The very nature of the psychic is oneness and essential equality, trust and love, joy and self-giving, and here one was busy with taking, demanding, dividing, hating, distrusting.

Yet another, and somewhat more startling shadow that confronted me was Hostility towards a person. Actually the root was the same - Ambition. But it had acquired a large enough character to demand attention in its own right. What was I hostile towards - was it a person or something the person stood for? This questioning brought me to even more basic truths that were a cause of even greater worry and celebration. On the one hand they pointed out to a basic flaw in one's nature, on the other they offered the hope of moving forward - for once the root is known, the work becomes easier. It was a hostility to all that I myself aspired for - truth, divinity, sincerity, selfless concentration, perfection. It was the dark part in my nature asserting itself against who I wanted to be and in my own depths already was.

Many things became clear. Other shadows became almost insipid compared to these two. Actually most emanated from the same source. The task now was to work on the central issue.

Walking in the Light

Trust, Love, Invocation. Once again three words came to my rescue. This was in response to the question 'which attitudes could help in true facilitation'. I felt a need to focus on the light, rather than on the shadow. All through the darkest periods something within me had refused to give up hope and strength. I knew the Grace was with me, awaiting my call. I had felt it supporting me in moments of despair. The very aspiration for light was a proof that all was not lost yet.

The answer seemed to lie in encouraging that part in me which sought after light, the more humane side in oneself, the part which knew how to give of itself; to encourage and deliberately evoke movements of love for another (a love of the goodness and aspiration in the other human being, as different from a personal, possessive love); to encourage trust in the other's potential and essential oneness of purpose. Each time a situation arose, I had a choice to act out of the light or the shadow. There were days and moments when the light stepped forth spontaneously, and there were days when the shadow clouded all. The day I could push the shadow away and deliberately replace it with light were days of deep contentment, the days when light was a spontaneous movement were magical.

It started becoming clear that a *sadhana* was essential. It was not enough to aspire now and then, it was not enough to be vigilant after a near-fall. If one wanted to establish anything in oneself, a daily discipline was demanded. The self-reflective journal became a means and a goad to do that. Would I be able to face myself in the evening - the time of self-reckoning - this thought often stopped me in my downward slide.

I speak as though all this is past. But it is very much ongoing, very new, very fresh. The journey has just begun. I have set for myself certain structures for an ongoing *sadhana*:

1. Physical: Rejection of *tamas* (through physical exercise)
2. Vital: Control over vital movements and opening the vital to the Divine Light as well as uplifting it through invocation and meditation.
3. Quietude in the mind. Widening.
4. Concentration in the heart centre and aspiration for the psychic. Quietude in work, offering, vigilance. To encourage the Divine Truth within me (to act from it). Invocation. Psychic fire.

5. A general focusing on the feeling of LOVE and TRUST - the two levers for change in my case, and LETTING GO - an inner movement of self-surrender, releasing the hold of the ego on a circumstance or a person or a work.
6. Giving precedence to other's wishes and ways and views - as a discipline.
7. No arguments. HARMONY at all costs, at all times. letting go, dissolve hardness, harshness.
8. To see all of us as one single whole. One unit. And to delight in each other's strengths.
9. Meditation to offer and invoke Mother's help - daily (at night). Reading '*Savitri*' before sleeping.
10. Meditation to focus on attitudes to take daily (morning).

Attitudes of a True Facilitator (Conclusion)

Writing this out has once again confronted me with how little I have put into practice compared with how much I have understood and intellectually given consent to. The major battle is with the vital - the seat of rebellion to the divine (at least, in my case). At another level, facilitations with students have continued or rather restarted as a gift of this course. The fear has gone. I look forward to taking a step further each time. And whenever the fear comes, I know what is behind it - Ambition. Change of nature in daily work situation remains the greater challenge. Facilitation at work has not even begun. Much more work needs to be done first on myself before that can happen. But that too will come.

Suggested Reading List

Sri Aurobindo

Letters on Yoga (1972) Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

The Mother

Collected Works of The Mother, 17 volumes (1978) Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Recommended: especially v.2, v.12 (On Education) and v.14

Note: Many of Mother's conversations, talks and articles have been compiled in various theme-based booklets. You may refer to these.

AS Dalal (compiler)

Growing Within, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Living Within, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Looking from Within, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

The Psychic Being, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Ameeta Mehra (compiler)

Abhaya: Fear - Its Cause and Cure (1999) The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi

Dhyana: Meditation for Inner Growth (1999) The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi

Karmayoga: Perfection in Work (2000) The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi

References

- ¹ The word ‘facilitation’ is used in this essay to connote ‘true teaching’ - a method which goes beyond instruction and imposition and works through a progressive understanding of the other person/child - not just as what he is but what he can be and truly wants to be.
- ² The darkness of Ignorance and Inconscience. Ignorance arising out of lack of knowledge about one’s true and complete self - resulting in an incomplete life, which knows only how to move in the fixed routine, but has no power to achieve anything out of the ordinary, and is cut off from the true purpose of one’s birth in humanity. Inconscience of forgetfulness of one’s origin - the divine, and hence a life that is veiled from the power of the divine, and is therefore ineffective and impotent, and has no power over oneself or over circumstances.
- ³ Adapted from an exercise during the course: Foundation Course for Facilitators
- ⁴ Sri Aurobindo explains the fivefold composition of a human being that makes up for the five main states of his being: physical (to do with the body), vital (to do with the life force, emotions, impulses, energies of action, desires), mental (to do with intellect and all mental faculties such as reasoning, memory, observation, concentration, judgment, imagination, intuition, etc.), psychic (to do with the spark of the Divine existent in him as *chaitya purusha* or the psychic being, deep in the centre of the heart - as a guiding light in the centre of one’s being, a still quiet voice in touch with the truth and what is right), spiritual (to do with one’s universal self, the soul or the spirit).
- ⁵ Refer to **AS Dalal**, *The Psychic Being*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry for further study
- ⁶ Refer to Appendix 1: ‘Attitudes of a True Facilitator: The Light and the Shadow’, for further details
- ⁷ An aim is generally set by the mind. Aspiration rises from the depths of your heart and carries with it the power of realisation. It is not the same as a desire or a craving. It is an urge for progress and its origin is in your psychic being.
- ⁸ **The Mother** (1978) *Collected Works of The Mother*, v.3, pp.220-21, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
- ⁹ Refer to **AS Dalal** (1987) *Living Within*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, for related exercises: ‘Using Life as a Mirror’ and ‘Becoming Aware of the Shadow’
- ¹⁰ The self-reflective journal and weekly summaries were introduced in the self-development courses held at the Gnostic Centre by Ameeta Mehra and the students have found these to be most helpful in sustaining progress
- ¹¹ **The Mother** (1978) *Collected Works of The Mother*, v.4, pp.38-40, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
- ¹² How to act without attachment to the result is the next step. For this see: Ameeta Mehra (2000) *Karmayoga: Perfection in Work*, The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi, and other related books
- ¹³ Refer to the Suggested Reading List at the end for further guidance on how to deal with human failings (physical, vital, mental) and how to strengthen the inner being
- ¹⁴ **Sri Aurobindo** (1972) *Letters on Yoga*, p.1687, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
- ¹⁵ **The Mother** (1978) *Collected Works of The Mother*, v.14, p.335, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ I was introduced to this meditation – many times – by Ameeta and each time the experience was new. This meditation is available on an audio cassette from The Gnostic Centre
- ¹⁸ **The Mother** (1978) *Collected Works of The Mother*, v.6, pp.313-14, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
- ¹⁹ This meditation too was introduced to me by Ameeta. It is available on an audio cassette from The Gnostic Centre
- ²⁰ **The Mother** (1978) *Collected Works of The Mother*, v.4, pp.104-05, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
- ²¹ The only place I know of where these two meditations are actually taught is The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi
- ²² At the Gnostic Centre special attention is given to creating harmony and order in the physical arrangement – flowers, incense, cleanliness, right kind of music, seating that facilitates communication
- ²³ Some of the other attitudes that I came up against were: Acting out of Distrust, Taking rather than Giving (putting personal convenience, personal aims first instead of the larger vision, the work in front), Focusing on people and personalities rather than work, Focusing on narrower, short-term aims rather than wider, long-term aims, Politicking and manipulation, Indiscipline, Personalised attitude towards Money, Insincerity, Escaping responsibility.