

# Sāvitṛī and Satyavān: The Path to Immortality

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## Part I

### The Vedic Myths of Immortality.

There are several myths of immortality in the Vedic tradition which have come to us in the form of stories, narrated in the *Brāhmaṇas*, Epics and *Purāṇas*. Here we would like to mention briefly some of them, but will mainly concentrate on the symbolism of the story of *Sāvitṛī* and *Satyavān*. Throughout these myths we come across events where persons are saved from death.

### The myth of Triśaṅku.<sup>1</sup>

In The *Rāmāyaṇa* *Triśaṅku*, also known as *Satyavrata*, was the king of *Ayodhyā*. After he gave his kingdom to his son *Hariścandra*, he wanted to ascend to heaven in his body. Therefore he asked *Vasiṣṭha* the family priest, to take him there, but *Vasiṣṭha* answered that it wasn't possible. Then *Viśvāmitra*, a sage, who was always jealous of *Vasiṣṭha*'s knowledge and power, decided to help *Triśaṅku*. When they both arrived at the gate of the heaven, access was denied and they had to go back. *Viśvāmitra* was furious. He decided to create for *Triśaṅku* his own artificial heaven between heaven and earth where he made him remain in his body.

### The Myth of *Naciketas*.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, there is the story of *Naciketas*. *Naciketas* was the son of *Vājaśravas*, who at the time of sacrifice didn't have anything valuable to offer to the gods. His cows became weary without food, his wealth disappeared, so he became very sad. *Naciketas* seeing him thus asked: "To whom are you going to give me, O father?" His father didn't answer, so *Naciketas* asked him a second time; but his father still didn't want to speak; at the third attempt, his father said: "I will give you to *Yama*!"

So *Naciketas* went to *Yama*, the God of Death. When he arrived at his palace, *Yama* was not there. *Naciketas* stayed at his palace for three days and three nights,

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<sup>1</sup> This myth belongs originally to the Vedic period, but was retold in the *Purāṇas* .

<sup>2</sup> *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.1

without food or drink. When *Yama* returned, he offered *Naciketas* three boons. The first boon the boy chose was that after his return home his father should not be angry with him. The second one was to learn about the heavenly fire, *tvam agnim svargyam adhyeṣi*.<sup>3</sup> And the third one was that he learns the secret of Death. The Lord of Death granted the first two, but did not want to grant him the third. To avoid giving *Naciketas* the secret of death, he offered him all kinds of gifts, such as a long and rich life and beautiful women, but *Naciketas* was only content with his request: "Leave all this for yourself", he said, "...this will only dry my senses and make them dull and ignorant!" His steadfastness to the search after truth made *Yama* very happy and He revealed to *Naciketas* the secret of Immortality. Not only this, but he also bestowed upon him the gift of a golden chain as the sign of his heavenly initiation, and he named the triple celestial fire after *Naciketas*.

#### The Myth of *Mārkaṇḍeya*.<sup>4</sup>

This is another great legend of the Vedic period. According to the legend, *Mṛkaṇḍu* didn't have a son but through severe penance over several years he was offered a boon from Lord *Śiva*. He was given the choice between a virtuous and wise son who would live only to his sixteenth birthday, and a dull and stupid son who would live one hundred years. *Mṛkaṇḍu* chose the wise son. After a little while his son was born and was called *Mārkaṇḍeya* after his father, which literally means 'the son of *Mṛkaṇḍu*'. He was a brilliant child who was loved by everyone. He learnt all the *Vedas* and *Śāstras* at an early age. When his sixteenth birthday was near his parents couldn't hide their sorrow. *Mārkaṇḍeya* wanted to know the reason for their grief, so eventually they told him the whole story and from that day on *Mārkaṇḍeya* started to perform *tapasya*. When the day of death arrived, he was meditating in front of a statue of *Śiva*. His *tapasya* was so luminous that none could even approach him, so the God of Death himself had to come to fetch him. But when *Yama* approached him and threw his snare, the boy suddenly embraced the statue of Lord *Śiva* so that *Yama* caught both him and the statue. Angry, Lord *Śiva* emerged from the statue and destroyed *Yama*. From that time, *Śiva* received the name *Mṛtyuñjaya*, destroyer of Death. He made *Mārkaṇḍeya* immortal, and to remain forever sixteen years old. Also, at the request of the gods he gave a new life to *Yama*.

*Mārkaṇḍeya* led a highly austere life. He spent all his time in deep uninterrupted meditation over six *Manvantaras* (periods of time in the creation of the Universe).

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<sup>3</sup> *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.13.

<sup>4</sup> *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*

In the seventh *Manvantara*, in which we live now, Indra got frightened by *Mārkaṇḍeya's* powers and tried to deviate him from his inner concentration, which would otherwise lead to the destruction of the Universe. He tried tempting him with celestial *apsaras* (nymphs) and gods time and again, but *Mārkaṇḍeya* was not interested in his tricks.

Finally Lord *Viṣṇu* intervened to awaken *Mārkaṇḍeya* from his deep meditation. *Mārkaṇḍeya* worshipped Lord *Viṣṇu*. Later *Pārvatī* and *Parameśvara* (Lord *Śiva*) told him: "All your desires will be realised, and you will live till the end of the world, young and famous". According to the Puranic tradition, *Mārkaṇḍeya* is one of those rare realised beings who are always present and move around in this Universe.

### **The Myth of *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān*.**

Some outstanding features of the tale of *Sāvitrī*.

Among all the outstanding characters in the history of Aryan civilisation narrated in the ancient Indian epics, *Sāvitrī* is unique. She possesses not only the quality of dedication and love for her husband, which all epic heroines possess, but also a power of absolute will and action.

*Sāvitrī* like *Sītā*, *Draupadī*, *Sakuntalā* and others, is a victim of circumstances, but unlike the other heroines she does not ask or require any help from outside to free herself and her beloved from doom. Moreover even her beloved does not know about it. While in the case of *Sītā*, *Rāma* is responsible for her liberation, and in the case of *Draupadī* the *Pāṇḍavas* are to fight for the crown to remove her misfortune, in the case of *Sāvitrī* she alone has to face her doom-and what a Doom! To fight the Lord of Death! This is the only story where Fate is changed "by an unchanging will".

Usually all the stories narrated in the Indian Epics and *Purāṇas* adopted a specific method of rendering. First we find the whole story outlined in brief, and then we enjoy watching it unfold. This was the most generally-used narrative method of the ancient epics. Knowing how the story was to end, it was interesting to see the unfolding of all the details. All the boons, curses and predictions which occur in the epics play the role of letting us know what to expect as we see them practically realised. Therefore when the *Devarṣi Nārada* proclaims that "this fate of *Satyavān* cannot be undone by whatever means" then that must be it! We ought to believe him, and we expect it to happen. What a surprise we experience

when we see that the prediction is not fulfilled and unchangeable Fate gets changed! This is very rare for the Epic style.

Thus the legend of *Sāvitrī* is one of those rare tales where predictions of a fatal end are undone. In the case of *Mārkaṇḍeya* the change is brought about by *Śiva*. In the case of *Sāvitrī* it is done by *Sāvitrī* herself. It is this particular feature which makes *Sāvitrī* unique - not only her *Pativrata* (dedication to her husband) quality, which is usually emphasised by the later Indian tradition.

We all know the story of *Sāvitrī* as it is narrated in the Mahabharata. Here I would like to look at it from a slightly different perspective, as the symbol of a "divine event" in the evolution of the world. The myth of *Sāvitrī* is about the event in the evolution of consciousness which should end the time of darkness and death and suffering, and bring mankind out of Darkness into Light, from Non-being into Being, from Death into Immortality. According to Sri Aurobindo the Night is "not our beginning nor our end". It is the outcome of the Supreme's involution through a progressive withdrawal of his aspect of Knowledge from his aspect of Power. The Night, which lies "across the path of the divine event", is to be crossed, by the evolution of consciousness, building up the consciousness of the multiplicity, the manifestation. The night of unconsciousness and death and suffering is not meant to be forever. The myth of *Sāvitrī* is about the event in the evolution of consciousness which should end the time of darkness and death and suffering. *Sāvitrī* is the Saviour, the Divine Mother, who by plunging into the Darkness brings the four creator emanations, and all their creations, back to the knowledge of the Supreme in themselves; and what is even more important, she brings about the birth of a new being: the Divine Child, the Supreme Other, the Supreme Individual.

### **Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the story.**

Sri Aurobindo in his "Author's Note" to his revelatory epic *Savitri - a Legend and a Symbol* says:

*"The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse,*

*her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena. Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.*"<sup>5</sup>

### **The myth of Sāvitrī in the Mahābhārata.**

The story of Sāvitrī as we first find it, is narrated in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* by Mārkaṇḍeya in answer to Yudhiṣṭhira's question about Draupadī: "Was there ever any other woman in the history of men who being dedicated to her husband suffered so much as *Draupadī*?" And the Rishi says, "Yes, there was one. It was *Sāvitrī*."<sup>6</sup>

#### **About the narrator Mārkaṇḍeya ṛṣi.**

It is interesting to note that the legend of Sāvitrī, belonging to the Vedic cycle of Myths on Immortality, is narrated by Mārkaṇḍeya, who himself, according to the *Purāṇas*, had gained the boon of Immortality from Mahādeva (Lord Śiva) in the first *Manvantara* of this *Kalpa*. He is also known as the author of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which consists of the most magnificent and profound mantras dedicated to the Divine Mother, called *Devī-Māhātmya*. Mārkaṇḍeya, the immortal worshiper of Śiva-Śakti, here in the *Mahābhārata* narrates the story of Sāvitrī, the incarnation of the Divine Mother who conquers Death.

#### **The story told by Mārkaṇḍeya.<sup>7</sup>**

The story is about a princess of *Madra*, Sāvitrī, so named because she was an incarnation of the Goddess Sāvitrī, as a result of her father, king *Aśvapati*, who performed severe penance over 18 years in order to gain progeny, specifically

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<sup>5</sup> *Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, Author's note

<sup>6</sup> *Mahābhārata*, *Vana Parva*, Story of Sāvitrī and Satyavān, Ch.1.1-3

<sup>7</sup> *Mahābhārata*, *Vana Parva*, 7 Chapters 293-299.

one hundred sons. The Goddess was pleased with his tapasya. However, she bestowed him not with sons but with a single daughter.

*Sāvitṛī* was so beautiful in her youth that none could approach her for marriage, being afraid of her splendour as of a supernatural power, *devakanyeti*.<sup>8</sup> Thus the girl had to find a husband for herself. The *Svayaṃvaram* marriage was announced and she went around the world in a golden chariot in search of her mate.<sup>9</sup> She travelled through all the kingdoms, lands and forests, but there was none to match her divine qualities, until finally in the forest she met *Satyavān*, the son of the blind and exiled King *Dyumatsena*.

When she returned to her father's palace, Devarṣi *Nārada* was there on a visit to *Aśvapati*. When *Sāvitṛī* announces that she has chosen *Satyavān*, *Nārada* exclaims that she has made a wrong choice, a big mistake, *mahat pāpam*. "Although he is the best among men", says *Nārada*, "he will die in one year from now, and nothing can be done about it."<sup>10</sup> After hearing such shocking news, King *Aśvapati* asks *Sāvitṛī* to find another person to marry. But *Sāvitṛī* refuses,<sup>11</sup> saying that she cannot choose twice when her heart and mind have once decided.

Thus she marries *Satyavān* and moves to his home in the forest. She serves *Satyavān* and his parents in every way without complaint, remembering the words of *Nārada* and counting the days of *Satyavān*'s life. Neither *Satyavān* nor his parents know anything about it. The time goes by very quickly, and three days before the destined day, *Sāvitṛī* performs a *mahāvratā tapasya*, standing for three days and nights without sleep or food, like a pillar in deep meditation. On the morning of the fourth day, after completing the vow, she notices that *Satyavān* is going to the forest to cut wood. She goes along with him, after some debate with him and his parents who want her to take rest after performing such a difficult *vratā*, but she requests them to let her go with *Satyavān* and they cannot refuse her.

In the woods *Satyavān* suddenly feels dizzy and lies down with his head on her lap. He feels as if thousands of knives are piercing his body and falls unconscious. Then she feels the presence of someone else. She sees a dark figure

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<sup>8</sup> *Sāvitṛī* in MhBh, 1.26.

<sup>9</sup> *Sāvitṛī* of MhBh, 1.32: *svayam anviccha bhartāram guṇaiḥ sadṛśam ātmanaḥ*, "Choose the husband for yourself, equal to your own qualities" -says *Aśvapati* to *Sāvitṛī*.

<sup>10</sup> *Sāvitṛī* of MhBh. 2.11-23

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 2.26-28

with red eyes approaching them. It is *Yama*, the God of Death, who has come to fetch *Satyavān*. He takes *Satyavān*'s soul and returns to his kingdom. But *Sāvitrī* follows him without delay. She speaks to him in perfect poetic Sanskrit, surprising him with her high knowledge and deep understanding of Dharma. So the Lord of Death, who is at the same time the Lord of Dharma, is immensely impressed with *Sāvitrī* and bestows upon her a series of boons:

- 1) Return of sight for *Satyavān*'s father, *Dyumatsena*;
- 2) Return of the kingdom which *Dyumatsena* once lost;
- 3) One hundred sons for her own father *Aśvapati* the boon he was aspiring for in his *tapasya*;
- 4) One hundred sons for *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān*;
- 5) And finally the life of *Satyavān*.

In the morning *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān* return home and see that the king *Dyumatsena* has got both his sight and his kingdom back. Neither *Satyavān* nor his parents know what has actually happened. Only the Rishis were aware, and praise *Sāvitrī* for her Divine Power of Love and Truth.

This, in brief, is the story, where a destiny predicted as inevitable was changed by the determination of a woman's will.

### **Vedic Symbolism in the Story.**

Here I would like to briefly elaborate on a few major features of the main characters in the story, in the light of the Vedic symbolism given by Sri Aurobindo.

There are two kings, representing the two kingdoms of Knowledge and Power. *Dyumatsena* - the Lord of the Shining Hosts, (lit. "With the Army of Rays or Luminous Beings"), the King of Knowledge<sup>12</sup> falls blind, here in the lower hemisphere, and thus loses his Kingdom.

1) He has a son, *Satyavān*, the growing Soul of Man, a prince, a king to be, who cannot live in the darkness of this creation without the support of light and truth and therefore is destined to die within a year. Nor has he any future as a prince, for his father has already lost his kingdom.

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<sup>12</sup> The rays, *gāvah*, *usrāh*, in the Vedas are the symbols of Consciousness in its aspect of Knowledge.

2) *Aśvapati* is the Lord of Horse.<sup>13</sup> Here in the lower hemisphere *Aśvapati* is involved in *Tapasya*, concentrated spiritual effort, dedicated to the Divine Mother, *Sāvitṛī*, 'goddess of the supreme Truth', calling for Her to support his spiritual work on earth with heirs or progeny. For his work has no future, unless he has a son to continue it.

3) The Goddess *Sāvitṛī*, having promised *Aśvapati* any boon he would ask for, did not give him the progeny he wanted, because she knew that without *Dyumatsena* first regaining his sight and his kingdom there would be no future for it, and all the endeavours of *Aśvapati* would be fruitless. This is the reason why her human embodiment, *Sāvitṛī*, asks *Yama* first for the return of *Dyumatsena's* sight and his kingdom, and only afterwards for the heirs for *Aśvapati*. Thus the goddess actually fulfils his wish by giving him a daughter, *Sāvitṛī*, who saves King *Dyumatsena* from his blindness and re-establishes his Kingdom of Knowledge, and thus opens up the opportunity for *Aśvapati*, the King of Power, to have a hundred sons.

Once this has been granted, she asks for children for herself and *Satyavān*: the Divine Race on earth. This is granted by *Yama* as inevitable after she has gained the three previous boons. This might give us the impression that *Yama* did not notice this, or was, so to say, cheated by *Sāvitṛī*. For each time he says: "Choose any boon except the life of *Satyavān*. It is really not that he does not understand what he is doing, but he agrees because the first three boons have prepared the conditions for the Divine Race on earth. And only then does *Sāvitṛī* ask for the life of *Satyavān*, the future King of Creation. This life of *Satyavān*, ('the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself') means the conversion of death into its origin.

The boons in the story can be understood symbolically, and as a reflection of the action of the Divine Mother upon the four fallen Divine Beings (according to the Mother's story of Creation) that was mentioned earlier in the first chapter:

a) The return of his sight and his kingdom to *Dyumatsena*, the Lord of Knowledge, could be seen as a symbol of the return of " *Consciousness in Light*" from the state of Darkness.

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<sup>13</sup> *aśva-*, horse, in the Vedas is a symbol of power, energy, force in opposition/complementary to *gauḥ*, cow or ray of light. As a symbol of knowledge the cow is to be in front of the horse (as indicated in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*), Knowledge is to rule Power.



b) One hundred sons for Aśvapati, the Lord of Power, probably symbolises the return of Bliss to its Origin. In the story of *Mārkaṇḍeya* it is mentioned that *Aśvapati*, being a perfect King, is loved by all his subjects, suffered a lot, *samtapam upajagmivān*,<sup>14</sup> from having no progeny, *anapatyam*.<sup>15</sup> In order to recover from that suffering he performed his tapasya for 18 years. (It is interesting to mention here that the world of bliss, *ānanda-loka*, being emanated from *sat* and *cit*, is the world of the multitude of souls, the world of eternal and infinite becoming, we may say. In the *Purāṇas* it is called *Mahar-loka* or *Janar-loka*, the world of Vast or the world of Genesis.)

c) One hundred sons of *Sāvitṛī* and *Satyavān* might be symbolic of the conversion of Falsehood into Truth. It is a symbol of the Supramental Manifestation upon Earth, with all its multitude of souls. Here *Sāvitṛī* is the Divine Mother and all men are her children: psychic beings.

d) The Life of *Satyavān*, meaning the Soul of Man will not die, is symbolic of the conversion of Death into its counterpart - the Divine Life.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother spoke about the pre-Vedic and pre-Chaldean traditions. For example the story of creation told by the Mother is based on her knowledge of that prehistoric tradition. The myth of *Sāvitṛī* has also some of those features, which cannot be fully understood within the Vedic tradition. It is only within the most archaic images and symbols of the oldest parts of the Veda that we can find a clue to these symbols in *Sāvitṛī*. Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Secret of the Veda*: "In images of an energetic incongruity reminding us of the sublime grotesques and strange figures that have survived from the old mystic and symbolic art of the prehistoric world, Vamadeva describes the Purusha in the figure of a man-bull, whose four horns are the four divine principles, .. ." (SV 308) "For all this creation has been, as it were, ejected into the subconscious by the four-horned Bull, the divine Purusha whose horns are infinite Existence, Consciousness, Bliss and. Truth."<sup>16</sup> We can clearly see the correspondence of these four with SAT-CIT-ANANDA-VIJNANA of the later Vedic and Vedāntic tradition. These four horns of the divine Purusha are perhaps the prehistoric symbols of those four original divine beings, mentioned by the Mother in her story of Creation. Infinite Existence corresponds to Life in the Mother's story, and all others follow the same order.

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, 1.7

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 1.8

<sup>16</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 307

There are some interesting implications following this kind of identification. The order of these beings falling into their opposites and the order of their recovery is the same, it is: Consciousness, Bliss, Truth and Life. The Life or infinite Existence (SAT) is falling last, and it is being recovered last. The Consciousness is falling first and is recovered first, which is fully understood within the Vedic tradition.

The conundrum of the story regarding the fourth boon of a hundred sons for her and *Satyavān* is impossible to understand unless we see the bigger picture. How could she ask for sons from *Satyavān*, if his life was not granted? And how could he, the Lord of Death, give her such a boon, if he was refusing to give back *Satyavān*'s life?

It IS only when we know that Existence, SAT, is to be recovered last that we understand what has actually happened. For infinite Existence consists of all other aspects of Consciousness, Bliss and Truth (Supermind), and cannot come into existence without them being manifested first in the world. The Truth or Supermind, as the Divine Manifestation in Matter (100 sons of *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān*), should be granted before the Infinite Existence can be effectuated. This was the secret knowledge, which made the narration of Mārkaṇḍeya seem irrational from the point of view of earthly wisdom. But from the point of view of the Infinite it is a perfect account. It also suggests that the Transformation will be fulfilled before it becomes finally effective and visible. It is probably this which makes Sri Aurobindo write about it in such a mysterious way:

*“A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,  
A Power into mind’s inner chamber steal,  
A charm and sweetness open life’s closed doors  
And beauty conquer the resisting world,  
The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,  
A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss  
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.  
In Matter shall be lit the spirit’s glow,  
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;  
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,  
The days become a happy pilgrim march,  
Our will a force of the Eternal’s power,  
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.  
A few shall see what none yet understands;  
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;  
For man shall not know the coming till its hour  
And belief shall be not till the work is done.”<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Savitri, p. 55

## Part 2

**What the Lord of Death did not know.**

According to the *story* of Creation told by the Mother to the children of the Ashram,<sup>18</sup> the Supreme Śakti (Knowledge-Force) for the sake of manifesting the Divine created Four Great Supreme Emanations of Consciousness, Bliss, Truth and Life. When these great beings started their Work they considered themselves as self-sufficient and thus got separated from the Supreme. So they fell gradually into their opposites: Light into Darkness, Bliss into Suffering, Truth into Falsehood and Life into Death.

In order to repair what was done, so to say, the secondary Emanations were created, which plunged, as it were, into the Abyss of the Inconscient. These Emanations were even greater in power and knowledge than the first ones, for they had to bring the fallen ones back to their origin.

These two Involutions created a double process of terrestrial evolution. The first has become an environment for the second to grow from within, enduring the resistance of its darkened instrumentation and illumining it by its growth.

There was a hierarchical unfolding of the Supreme Śakti. Though these four beings are one and the same Supreme, there is a certain order of their relations and their fall.<sup>19</sup> Basically SAT contains all: *Sat-Cit-Ananda-Vijñāna*. It is all only SAT, the Eternal Life, the Divine Being, which IS Conscious and Blissful and Truthful in Its infinite qualities.

To turn the Eternal Life to its opposite Death, a certain process must take place: the darkening of the Supreme Consciousness must take place first, for without it there could be no other fall - for how could the Supreme who alone IS can stop being the Supreme?<sup>20</sup> So, He gradually forgets Himself as Supreme, and thus creates a duality within His wholeness: on one side He knows Himself as such (Transcendental), and there is a part of Him which doesn't know that it is Him (Manifestation), but it is Him.

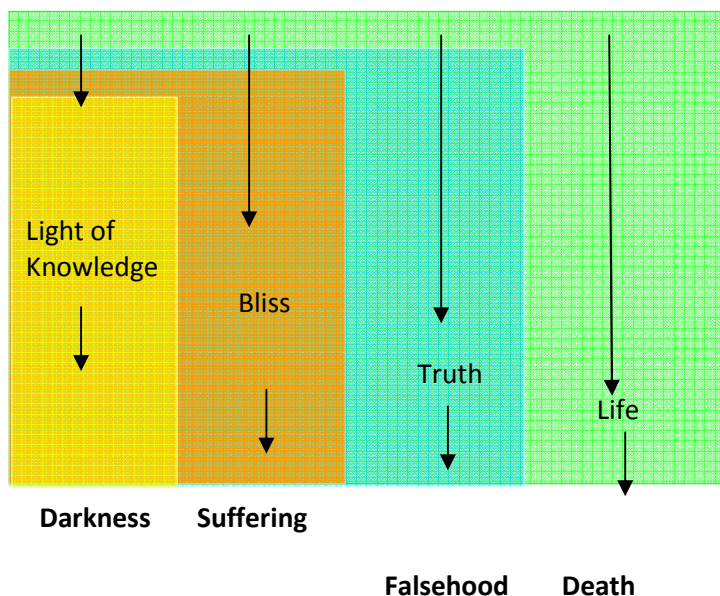
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<sup>18</sup> MCW; *Questions and Answers* 16 October 1957, Vol. 9 p. 205-6; see also: *About Savitri*, published by Huta, Vol. I.

<sup>19</sup> *About Savitri*, published by Huta, Vol. I.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. also with the biblical story of the Fall of Adam and Eve, where Eve, representing *Cit-Tapas* is first to try the apple and only then Adam, representing the aspect of *Sat-Puruṣa*. Similar to *Sāvitri* regaining first the sight and kingdom of *Dyumatsena* and only then the hundred sons of *Aśvapati*, for Knowledge (*Cit*) is to be restored first and only then the Power (*Tapas*).

The Supreme Mother  
( CHIT ANANDA VIJNANA SAT)<sup>21</sup>



*"In the enigma of the darkened Vasts,  
In the passion and self-loss of the Infinite ...  
A contradiction founds the base of life:  
The eternal, the divine Reality  
Has faced itself with its own contraries;  
Being became the Void and Conscious-Force  
Nescience and walk of a blind Energy  
And Ecstasy took the figure of world-pain."*<sup>22</sup>

Once the Supreme is unaware of himself, the Suffering within his Blissful being is the next result. The fall of these two great beings created a new ground for the aspect of Truth in his Infinite qualities to turn into Falsehood, differentiating the qualities as such and defining them in their separate existence, in negative terms, which triggers finally the Supreme Denial of Life: Death. Thus the Supreme

<sup>21</sup> *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 307. By this picture we wanted to show also that all the three Consciousness, Bliss and Truth are only the aspects of SAT, the Supreme Existence, the Eternal Life, that is way it falls last. Actually it is the only thing which falls.

<sup>22</sup> *Savitri*, p.141

could start from zero, as it were.<sup>23</sup> The Falsehood in this scheme plays a key role for this perception of otherness. Without it the fall of Life would not be complete.<sup>24</sup>

Let us try to define these four:

- 1) Darkness is a light of Knowledge unaware of the Supreme. It can be described as the absence of Knowledge within the Consciousness itself. It is the first distortion of the Supreme Consciousness.
- 2) Suffering is an expression of the Power of the Supreme, which due to this first distortion of Knowledge, is wrongly applied/used, causing so called suffering within its being. It is the first distortion of the Supreme Power (=Being) in its self-movement as unconscious being.
- 3) Falsehood is a movement of Knowledge, rooted in the Darkness, starting its unfolding from the fallen Light of Consciousness. It leads to a much greater distortion of Power - Death. It is based already on Darkness itself, whereas the Darkness is still based on Light.
- 4) Death is a Power of the Supreme's being based on the Inconscient as its Self. It is the denial of everything that is not Supreme in its Being. It is the second distortion of the Supreme Power based on the Inconscient itself.

When in Sri Aurobindo's epic the Lord of Death realises that *Sāvitrī* is the Supreme Mother and not a human being, he decides to give her a final battle and calls for these four *Asuras* as his great powers:

*He called to **Night** (=Darkness) but she fell shuddering back,  
He called to **Hell** (=Suffering) but sullenly it retired:  
He turned to the **Inconscient** (=Absence of Truth, Falsehood) for support,  
From which he was born, his vast sustaining self;  
It drew him back towards boundless vacancy  
As if by himself to swallow up himself:  
He called to **his strength** (=Death himself as blind Energy of the Supreme), but it  
refused his call.  
His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.  
At last he knew defeat inevitable  
And left crumbling the shape that he had worn,  
Abandoning hope to make man's soul his prey  
And force to be mortal the immortal spirit.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The purpose of this self-Denial is in His Original Intent to become Another, to start life of Another and for that He had to deny himself first.

<sup>24</sup> *Savitri*, p.141

<sup>25</sup> *Savitri*, p.667. The major function of Death was to force the Immortal spirit to undergo changes: to become mortal.

There are very interesting insights here on the nature of Death, who "was born" from the Inconscient, where Truth is not, which is at the same time his "vast sustaining self". The first two Lords of Night and Hell are also connected with him and are his support and power, but not as closely as the Inconscient.

He calls on them one by one in the order of their fall: Darkness, Suffering, Falsehood, and finally he can rely only on his own strength, his blind Energy - Death himself.

We can see a clear gradation of the Fall of Knowledge-Power of the Supreme. The fall starts with Consciousness and ends with Power (=Being). The Lord of Death says to Savitri confirming this view:

*Who then art thou hiding in human guise?  
Thy voice carries the sound of infinity,  
Knowledge is with thee, Truth speaks through thy words;  
The light of things beyond shines in thy eyes.  
But where is thy strength to conquer Time and Death?  
Hast thou God's force to build heaven's values here?  
For truth and knowledge are an idle gleam  
If Knowledge brings not power to change the world,  
If Might comes not to give to Truth her right.  
A blind Force, not Truth has made this ignorant world.  
A blind Force, not Truth orders the lives of men:  
By Power, not Light, the great Gods rule the world;  
Power is the arm of God, the seal of Fate.<sup>26</sup>*

Death is to ensure the existence of the Absolute, which alone is, and none else can be:

*I have created all, all I devour;  
I am Death and the dark terrible Mother of life,  
I am Kali black and naked in the world,  
I am Maya and the universe is my cheat.  
I lay waste human happiness with my breath  
And slay the will to live, the joy to be  
That all may pass back into nothingness  
And only abide the eternal and absolute.  
For only the blank Eternal can be true.<sup>27</sup>*

It has many implications in the later dealing with creation, for instance: nothing can claim its "separate birth" unless and until it is the Supreme itself. This provides a dynamic basis for a perfect future manifestation in time and space. The

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p. 663

<sup>27</sup> Savitri, p.535

manifestation is to be also supreme, and nothing less than that. Otherwise the lord of Death will destroy it, in order to find better solutions. In this way he becomes the very engine of Evolution. Every form which is not perfect is destined to perish, giving way to a more perfect manifestation of the Supreme. The function of Death ends there where the Supreme manifestation starts: Immortality in matter, the Eternal Life.

We can compare Death also to the function of Zero in the system of numbers. Zero is necessary to underline the existence of One in its self-awareness, as it were. It implies that only One Is and there is None else. It is within this Zero that all the selves, as the projection of One, take their place as multitude, and can stay as a sum, and as separate numbers: 1,2,3, etc., but Zero is only one for all of them, and therefore it always points to the Absolute in all their combinations. Without this zero the multitude would not be possible, for it is the only place within the One, where it takes other shapes for itself and becomes another, as it were.

*I am the shapeless formidable Vast,  
I am the emptiness that men call Space,  
I am a timeless Nothingness carrying all,  
I am the Illimitable, the mute Alone.  
I, Death, am He; there is no other God.  
All from my depths are born, they live by death;  
All to my depths return and are no more.  
I have made a world by my inconscient Force.<sup>28</sup>*

Death is a fall of Life of the Supreme Existence, SAT. That is why he says: *I, Death, am He; there is no other God. I have made a world by my inconscient Force.* Interestingly he mentions that the Force was inconscient which shows that the Fall has already taken place.

So on one side the Lord of Death has made the world by his inconscient Force, Force without Knowledge, and on the other hand he knows that only the blank Eternity is true, which wasn't ever made. He doesn't believe in this world as true, for he knows that the Supreme alone is true, and because he himself has made it by the inconscient force of the Supreme. And since he created this world he has full right over it, as he claims it.

The only thing which he seems not to know is that the world he created has a higher purpose than to remain always unconscious or half-conscious. There was an original Intent of the Supreme of which the Lord of Death was not informed, so to say, for the sake of the Game to be played truly. The purpose of the whole second Creation-the plunge by the Supreme into the darkness, and lying at the bottom of the Inconscient – seems unknown to him, for all that happened after He was made to create the world, and seems contradictory of the original

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p.592

purpose of Creation of which he *was* aware -that none else can Be but the Supreme, of which he, Death, is the Existence, *Sat*, but fallen and become *Asat*, Non-existence. Therefore no separate birth can be allowed to endure, but that of the Absolute.

For the Lord of Death the only reality is a blank Eternity without creation. Creation is something like ripples on the waters of Eternity. It came after Him, it is his work so to say. So the Lord of Death knows two states: the blank Eternity and the Creation, of which the latter He effectuates, moves, creates, and destroys. What He seems not to know is that these very ripples he seems to create and destroy are the evolving and growing Supreme from within the Darkness towards Its own newly rediscovered Identity, and that he, the Lord of Death, is not actually an ultimate creator but a helper to accomplish something which is beyond his knowledge and purpose. He seems not to know about the original Intent of the Supreme to create Another Himself, to become many Individual Supremes. He takes it only as a play, *Lila* of the Supreme, to amuse Himself with Himself in time and space. The whole creation for him is like a playground full of toys to play with for the Child-God. He cannot take them seriously as something closely related to the Supreme. He knows that their nature is of Darkness and is of no match to the Supreme.

*Who art thou who claimst thy crown of separate birth,  
The illusion of thy soul's reality  
And personal godhead on an ignorant globe  
In the animal body of imperfect man?*

*Hope not to be happy in a world of pain  
And dream not, listening to the unspoken Word  
And dazzled by the inexpressible Ray,  
Transcending the mute Superconscient's realm,  
To give a body to the Unknowable,  
Or for a sanction to thy heart's delight  
To burden with bliss the silent still Supreme  
Profaning its bare and formless sanctity,  
Or call into thy chamber the Divine  
And sit with God tasting a human joy.*<sup>29</sup>

Here he is clearly neglecting the growing Divine within the heart of man, the Psychic Being, mentioning that the Transcendent Self should not be burdened with the bliss of the heart's delight.<sup>30</sup> The Supreme should not be loved, and therefore bothered by the growing Psychic Being within the heart of man, calling

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, p.534

<sup>30</sup> Cp. the Myth of Shiva and Parvati, where Parvati tried to disturb Shiva with her love and how he reacted to it.



Him into its chamber to be together here in the body '*tasting the human joy*'. It seems that this kind of adventure is not attracting the Lord of Death. He seems not to understand it in positive terms but only in a negative way, or at the most as a temporary event with no reason to be or purpose to become:

All from my depths are born, they live by death;

All to my depths return and are no more.<sup>31</sup>

Let us again view the conversion of these four great Emanations into their origin through studying the symbolic boons *Sāvitrī* received from *Yama*:

- 1) The return of sight and kingdom to blind King *Dyumatsena*, the Lord of Knowledge, who has lost his sight and thus the celestial kingdom here in the lower hemisphere, is a symbol of the conversion of the Lord of Darkness into the original Light.<sup>32</sup>
- 2) The removal of suffering of the Lord *Aśvapati*, the Lord of Power, by granting him royal progeny is a symbol of the restoration of the original Bliss (see the usage of *janar-loka* as *ānanda-loka* in the *Purāṇas*).
- 3) The conversion of Falsehood into Truth is symbolised by the boon of 100 sons for *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān*, even though the life of *Satyavān* was not granted yet. It is a symbol of the Supramental Manifestation upon earth, which is to be achieved before the real Immortality can be effectuated. That is why the boon is granted before the life of *Satyavān* is given back. Immortality should be dared to be called upon by mortal men, and that is an apparent contradiction.
- 4) And the final boon is the transformation of Death itself into the Eternal Life symbolized by the return of the life of *Satyavān*. Technically it means that there will be no more contradiction and disharmony between the Soul involved in Manifestation and the Manifestation as such. Manifestation itself becomes of the Supreme Nature.

*Why Sri Aurobindo is not using the name of Yama in his Savitri.*

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<sup>31</sup> Savitri, p.593

<sup>32</sup> By the way, the two boons for the Lord *Dyumatsena* may also have deeper significance. The sight of the King can be a symbol of his transcendental Knowledge, the kingdom may be a symbol of the involvement of the Psychic in manifestation. Both have to be realized here: the overhead Presence of *Jivātmā*, the Witness of *Puruṣa*, and the presence in the heart of *Antarātmā* or *Caitya Puruṣa*.

It is important to note here is that although Sri Aurobindo uses all the original names from the story of the *Mahābhārata* to convey the deepest symbolism of the *Veda*, unlike in the *Mahābhārata* he never uses the name *Yama* to refer to the Lord of Death. Why?

In the *Vedas*, *Yama* is not yet the Lord of Death, a role which he becomes identified with in the post-Vedic tradition. Initially, he is one of the *Āṅgiras ṛṣis* and the first soul who, after death, discovered the way back to the original abode of all souls, the highest heaven where the forefathers abide. Thus it became his responsibility to accompany the souls after death through the abyss of darkness to this highest resting place. In the *Vedas*, then, *Yama* is rather a saviour of the soul than a killer of the body. He symbolises the Sun, the supramental oneness of all souls. In other words, he belongs to the second creation -the plunge into the inconscient - and does not represent the inconscient itself, which the Lord of Death represents. For Sri Aurobindo the Lord of Death is the most powerful of the four fallen supreme emanations of the first creation and not the Supreme Soul which descended into the Inconscient to save it.

### Part 3

#### The four Boons in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

In Book XI of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*, the Supreme grants *Sāvitri* the four boons, after she revealed herself as the Divine Mother and conquered Death:<sup>33</sup>

1

“Choose, spirit, thy supreme choice not given again;  
For now from my highest being looks at thee  
The nameless formless peace where all things rest. ...”

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

2

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

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<sup>33</sup> 33 *Savitri*. 4th rev ed. 1993, pp.696-697

Unweave the stars and into silence pass."

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

3

Mightily retreating like a sea in ebb  
 A third time swelled the great admonishing call:  
"I spread abroad the refuge of my wings.  
 Out of its incommunicable deeps  
 My power looks forth of mightiest splendour, stilled  
 Into its majesty of sleep, withdrawn  
 Above the dreadful whirlings of the world."

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

4

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

Breaking the Silence with appeal and cry  
 A hymn of adoration tireless climbed,  
 A music beat of winged uniting souls,  
 Then all the woman yearningly replied:  
**"Thy embrace which rends the living knot of pain,  
 Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe,  
 Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,  
 Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men."**

In this profound passage we can clearly see that *Sāvitrī* followed the Supreme in his choice of boons he wanted to bestow upon earth and Man. Before choosing a boon, she heard clearly stated the intention of what is to be done and at the same time the response of the earth, the souls of Mankind and earthly things, as for instance: "*A sob of things was answer to the voice*", "*She heard a million creatures cry to her*", etc. It is as if the Supreme and the world were one, and the world reacted in complete unison to the intention of the Supreme.

The four intentions of the Supreme were:

- (1) *The nameless formless peace where all things rest;...*
- (2) *My spirit leans down to break the knot of earth,  
Amorous of oneness without thought or sign;...*
- (3) *My power looks forth of mightiest splendour, ...*
- (4) *To uncover the voiceless rapture of my bliss...*

And Savitri chose them all:

- 1) **Thy peace, O Lord, a boon within to keep...**
- 2) **Thy oneness, Lord, in many approaching hearts,...**
- 3) **Thy energy, Lord, to seize on woman and man,...**
- 4) **Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe...**

We can see that the first two boons are of the inner nature (peace within to keep, oneness in many approaching hearts), whereas the two last are oriented to a global consciousness-power including the outer nature (energy to seize on woman and man, joy in which all creatures breathe, etc.), where the distinction between inner and outer realisation is not made.

### *II Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and his Yogic realisations.*

It is as if the four boons symbolically cover the four main realisations in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, which are also oriented from the inner realisation towards the outer (the work of Redemption):

- 1) Peace is a sign or a result of Liberation, *Mukti*, as a separation of *Puruṣa* from *Prakṛti*, the experience Sri Aurobindo had with Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, when peace descended upon him from above, and he could experience the absolute detachment of *Puruṣa* from the workings of *Prakṛti* and see himself completely free from the body-vital-mind as if in a movie, the liberation inside or realisation of the static Self.
- 2) The experience of the "*oneness in many approaching hearts*" to the Lord, *Nārāyaṇa*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* as their own "*sweet infinity*". The experience of the Cosmic Self "*in the numberless souls*" is very similar to the experience Sri Aurobindo underwent in the Alipore jail, where he saw *Vasudeva* in every human and nonhuman being, the experience of blissful oneness of

the Supreme living in every creature and every thing, the liberation outside or realisation of the dynamic Self.

- 3) The experience of the Supreme Knowledge-Power, which is "to seize on woman and man, to take all things and creatures in their grief and gather them into a mother's arms" is a description of the action of the Supramental Śakti, where the *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* finally become one and change their nature to *Īśvara-Śakti*, revealing the true nature of the Supreme within manifestation, that everything is done by *Śakti* alone, for She is none but He, His dynamic being, liberating us from the perception of a separate doer, making a complete surrender possible, leading All to the Supramental transformation. In a letter to a *sādhaka* Sri Aurobindo mentions that he has caught the tail of the Supermind and is trying to bring It down into earthly life.
- 4) The last and the greatest realisation of them all is the descent of the Supreme *Ānanda*, through the Supramental transformation, manifesting in all the actions here on earth His embrace, His joy, His 'magic flowing waters of deep love', and 'sweetness'. This is the final aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, the *Pūrṇa Yoga*.

### III Conversations with Pavitra in 1925:

Sri Aurobindo defines clearly the three stages in his yoga in "Conversations with Pavitra"<sup>34</sup>: (1) *Puruṣa* as a witness, free and not involved in the activities of *Prakṛti*; (2) *Puruṣa* free but giving his sanction to her workings; (3) *Puruṣa* free and at the same time completely involved in all her activities; to which we may only add the fourth one as a result of these three: (4) the opening to the transcendental realms, where *Ānanda* itself enters into the workings of *Prakṛti*, about which he speaks elsewhere in *The Life Divine*.

- 1) First the *Puruṣa* is realised as a silent witness, not participating in the action of *Prakṛti*, only observing her, detached from her actions, bringing the experience of calm and peace. This stage is called *Mukti* or liberation. This stage is considered to be the final achievement for many paths of yoga, including Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism (*Advaita Vedānta*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga* etc.)
- 2) Later he becomes *Anumantā*, Sanctioner of the actions of *Prakṛti*. He agrees or disagrees with her movements, and she completely obeys his consent.
- 3) Then the *Puruṣa* gradually reveals himself as the Lord, *Īśvara*, who fully takes this world into his hands, whereas *Prakṛti* becomes His *Śakti*. The difference between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* disappears, and *Īśvara-Śakti* become one movement of consciousness-power in the world.

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<sup>34</sup> "Conversation avec Pavitra"; Ashram, Pondicherry, 1995.

- 4) This oneness of *Īśvara-Śakti* then opens up to the Transcendental realms of the Supreme *Ānanda*, which now can descend into the lower hemisphere, transforming every physical action on earth into an action of the Divine *Ānanda*.

It is important to see that these four are the four fundamental stages of a complete path leading to the full liberation and transformation of the earthly nature, thus culminating in the divine life. In his early days, before Mother settled permanently in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo followed his plan of yoga which he formulated as *śuddhi-mukti-siddhi-bhukti*, which again resembles the whole approach to his Yoga as the conscious advent in the evolution of man. According to this approach, after *Mukti* is realised and the Puruṣa is freed from the workings of *Prakṛti* into self-awareness, the stage of *Siddhi* or the perfection of the instruments becomes possible. In the conversations with Pavitra, who came to Sri Aurobindo seeking the realisation of *Mukti*, Sri Aurobindo says that there are people in India who could give Pavitra this realisation (of *Mukti*), but before he has to learn their language; as for himself this stage of *Yoga* was already over, *Mukti* was realised, but this was only the first step in his *Yoga*. The second step was to bring the light from above into the instrumentations of mind, life and body, being fully conscious of all the processes and changes which take place. This part was far more difficult than the first one, but without it there would not be much use for liberation (*Mukti*), because Nature would be left unchanged. The fourth part of this *Yoga*, *Bhukti*, is the result of the first three as the realisation of the Delight of the Supreme in the physical body.

We can clearly see the resemblance of these four parts of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga with the four boons *Sāvitrī* received from the Supreme.

***The four boons and the conversion of the four Asuras by the Mother.***

In Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Sāvitrī*, after conquering Death, gets four boons from the Supreme. They are positive boons, as it were, given in a positive context by the Supreme when the Death is already conquered. In the *Mahābhārata* she gets her boons from *Yama* himself in a negative context, so to say, without conquering him.

The conversion of the four *Asuras*, which the Mother mentioned in the *Agenda* as her main work of the transformation of our earthly life, must be directly connected with these four boons *Sāvitrī* receives from the Supreme, as it is obviously there in the story of the *Mahābhārata*.

These four Supreme emanations and the order of their fall the Mother defines in conversation with Huta: The first was Consciousness in Light and He turned into Unconsciousness. The second was Bliss and He turned into Suffering. The third was Truth and He turned into Falsehood. The fourth one was Life and He turned into Death. So, in order to repair the fall of these four beings, so to say, .... *"The creative Force which had emanated these four Beings, essentially for the creation of the world, witnessed what was happening, and turning to the Supreme she prayed for the remedy and the cure of the evil that had been done. Then she was given the command to precipitate her Consciousness into this inconscience, her Love into this suffering, and her Truth into this falsehood. And a greater consciousness, a more total love, a more perfect truth than what had been emanated at first, plunged, so to say, into the horror of Matter in order to awaken in it consciousness, love and truth, and to begin the movement of Redemption which was to bring the material universe back to its supreme origin. "*

Let us try to understand the order of their fall:

- 1) The darkening of the Supreme Consciousness is to be the first. Without it there can be no other fall, so to say. Here the Supreme gradually forgets himself (= the blindness of *Dyumatsena*).
- 2) Once the Supreme is unaware of himself, the Suffering within his Blissful being is the next result (= the suffering of *Aśvapati*).
- 3) These two Darkness and Suffering give a new ground for an emergence of Falsehood. It is a newly started Awareness of Separateness, as it were, based already on the Darkness and Suffering (or darkened Consciousness and darkened Being).
- 4) This Falsehood becomes a new 'self-awareness' for the Supreme Denial of the very existence in itself: Death.

So, these four, though they are one in their origin, were necessary for the Supreme to gradually come to a complete Non-existence, starting with forgetfulness of itself and ending with a complete denial of its supreme Existence. In this scheme, the creation of Falsehood is the key, I think, for there had to be another perception of itself, some other knowledge of a separate being, before the Being could be turned into Non-being. Without falsehood death would not be possible.

Therefore these last two, Falsehood and Death, were the most difficult to convert. Mother says that the first two were converted, but the last two were impossible to convert, they had to be conquered.<sup>35</sup>

These four beings we also meet in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* as Death's immanent powers. As we have already mentioned above, he calls to them for help in the

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<sup>35</sup> She tried to convert them through contact with their Vibhuti: Max Theon as the Vibhuti of the Asura of Death and Richard Moriset as the Vibhuti of the Lord of Falsehood.

battle with the Divine Mother in the same order of their fall as it is described by the Mother. Here we will quote these lines once more:

*He called to **Night** but she fell shuddering back,  
He called to **Hell (=Suffering)** but sullenly it retired:  
He turned to the **Inconscient (=Falsehood)** for support,  
From which he was born, his vast sustaining self;  
It drew him back towards boundless vacancy  
As if by himself to swallow up himself:  
He called to **his strength (=Death)**, but it refused his call.  
His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.*

The conquest of these four immanent aspects of Death, the four *Asuras*, is the Supreme Victory of the Divine Mother. So if we compare them with the four boons she received from the Supreme later after conquering them: the Divine Peace, Oneness, Strength and Love we will have an interesting picture.

- 1) Night is in opposition to the Consciousness in Light or, better to say, a counterpart of Self-Awareness. It is a fallen Light of Consciousness, which covered up or hid the divine self-perception; the *Puruṣa* is hidden within the workings of *Prakṛti*.<sup>36</sup> It made the conscious element in us blind (the symbol of blind *Dyumatseṇa*), as it were.  
Peace is experienced when the concrete presence of the Self, free from Nature, is realised. The Divine Is and there is nothing to be afraid of and that brings the experience of deep Peace; Peace and Purity are the attributes of the transcendent *Puruṣa*.
- 2) Hell (= Suffering) is in opposition to Bliss, or the blissful existence within the Being or even co-existence among beings. If Night separates us from our self-perception of the Divine Consciousness within us, the Suffering pushes us away from the Divine Oneness in the aspect of power within ourselves and without: from each other, being from being. For the Power of Bliss is experienced now as pain, confirming the division made by the Night. It is because of this suffering that the oneness of the one being cannot be achieved, for pain stays in the way, where bliss and love should be (the symbol of suffering *Aśvapati*).
- 3) Inconscient (= Falsehood) is an opposition to the Supramental Knowledge-Power, to the Truth of our manifested existence.

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<sup>36</sup> In the language of the Veda, Agni, the son, the young prince, is kept inside the young Mother, she carries him secretly and does not give him to his Father. RV 5.2.1



Inconscience is the vast sustaining self of Death. To overcome Death we must overpower it with the strength of the Supramental Power. This Falsehood and Death cannot be illumined, but are overpowered by the Strength of the Divine Mother with the participation of All.<sup>37</sup>

*But where is thy strength to conquer Time and Death?  
Hast thou God's force to build heaven's values here?  
For truth and knowledge are an idle gleam  
If Knowledge brings not power to change the world,  
If Might comes not to give to Truth her right.  
A blind Force, not Truth has made this ignorant world,  
A blind Force, not Truth orders the lives of men:  
By Power, not Light, the great Gods rule the world;  
Power is the arm of God, the seal of Fate.*

The Supramental manifestation upon Earth (one hundred sons of *Sāvitri* and *Satyavān* is another symbol of it), which is spoken of as the Divine Energy “to seize on woman and man, and... gather them into a mother's arms.”

- 4) Death is in opposition to the Divine Existence, which contains all the four aspects of Night, Suffering, Falsehood and Death's own Power.<sup>38</sup> Death is the power which created these worlds, the divine being *SAT*, the Supreme Life, which turned to be Death. Now his Consciousness of Night has refused to cooperate with him, His Power of Separation, Hell, which is dividing the Oneness, is also sullenly retired; his very Self, the Inconscient, is not supporting him anymore, he is left alone to face the Mother. Death is the foundation of the separation of the Higher *Prakṛti* of *Sat-Cit-Ānanda* from the lower one of Mind-Life-Body. When this foundation is removed, then every movement and touch in all creation becomes the movement and touch of the Supreme *Ānanda*.

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<sup>37</sup> We are using here ‘All’ as a philosophical term used in the Vedas, *sarvam idam*, meaning all powers, forces, beings participating in manifestation of the Divine.

<sup>38</sup> *He called to his strength, (= Death itself) but it refused his call.  
His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.*

*The Triple Transformation in Integral Yoga.*

So, we can compare the four boons of the Supreme with the three stages of transformation in Integral Yoga which result in the fourth and the final realisation of Immortality and the Divine Life on Earth.

- I. *First is the psychic transformation, in which all is in contact with the Divine through the individual psychic consciousness.*
- II. *Next is the spiritual transformation in which all is merged in the Divine in the cosmic consciousness.*
- III. *Third is the supramental transformation in which all becomes supramentalised in the divine gnostic consciousness.*<sup>39</sup>

To summarize our overview of the four boons and different sets of symbols in the story of the Mahabharata and from Sri Aurobindo's poem, as well as the major stages of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga we draw here a simple table which will help us to dwell on this profound symbolism and to understand deeper the story of Savitri and the reason why Sri Aurobindo has chosen it to convey his realisations. In the words of the Mother: **"Savitri is the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision."**

There are four main characters in the story, which are highly significant. The two Kings of Knowledge and Power, perfect in every respect, but one, *Dyumatsena*, is blind and has lost his kingdom and the other, *Aśvapati*, has his kingdom but is suffering. The first King has a son, *Satyavān*, but has no kingdom; the latter has the kingdom but no son; so through rigorous spiritual practice or *tapasya* *Aśvapati* acquires from the goddess a daughter, *Sāvitrī*. These two children are perfect in every respect; but nobody wants to be with *Sāvitrī*, for she is too good, *devakanyeti*, and nobody approaches her for marriage; and *Satyavān*, though he is a perfect young man, is destined to die in a year.

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<sup>39</sup> Letters on Yoga, p. 95

		Parents		Children	
		1	2	3	4
		Knowledge	Power	Knowledge	Power
1	Four major characters, before <i>Sāvitrī's</i> marriage	<b>Blind</b> <i>Dyumatsena</i>	<b>Suffering</b> <i>Aśvapati</i>	<b>Unasked, Unmarried</b> <i>Sāvitrī</i> <sup>40</sup>	<b>Dying</b> <i>Satyavān</i>
2	Four major characters, after one year of life with <i>Satyavān</i>	<b>Seeing</b> <i>Dyumatsena</i>	<b>Happy</b> <i>Aśvapati</i> (100 sons)	<b>Married</b> <i>Sāvitrī</i> (100 sons)	<b>Living</b> <i>Satyavān</i>
3	Four Great Asuras, Fallen Emanations of the Supreme	<b>Light</b> turned into <b>Darkness</b>	<b>Bliss</b> turned into <b>Suffering</b>	<b>Truth</b> turned into <b>Falsehood</b>	<b>Life</b> turned into <b>Death</b>
4	Four Immanent aspects of Death in Sri Aurobindo's <i>Savitri</i>	<b>Night</b>	<b>Hell</b>	<b>The Inconscient</b>	<b>Death's own strength</b>
5	Major realisations	<b>Mukti</b> ,  The separation of <i>Puruṣa</i> from <i>Prakṛti</i> , the discovery of the individual Self  <i>The Divine is in me and above me</i>	<b>Cosmic Self</b> ,  The realisation of the Godhead in all beings  <i>The Divine is in All</i>	<b>Supramental</b> ,  The realisation of all beings as one in knowledge-force  <i>All are in the Divine</i>	<b>Transcendental</b> ,  The realisation of the Supreme Ananda  <i>All is the Divine</i>
6	The four boons of <i>Sāvitrī</i> in Sri Aurobindo's epic	<b>Peace</b> (a boon within to keep) as a result of Self-realisation of <i>Puruṣa</i>	<b>Oeness</b> (in many approaching hearts) as a result of Bliss among the beings	<b>Strength</b> (to bring all into the Mother's arms) as a result of the Truth of that Oeness	<b>Joy</b> , (in which all creatures breathe) as a result of the realisation of the transcendental <i>Ānanda</i>

<sup>40</sup> *Sāvitrī* was most beautiful and yet nobody asked her hand in marriage. It is unheard of in the history of Aryan civilisation that someone so beautiful was not asked for in marriage (especially if we compare the stories of *Sītā*, *Damayantī*, *Kuntī*, etc.). *Sāvitrī*, I believe, wasn't approached not because she had divine beauty but because she contained divine Truth also. No one could stand her true nature, only *Satyavān*. She is an incarnation of the Divine Word, the Power of Truth.