We are facing an evolutionary crisis and are at the crossroads. One road leads to human unity and brotherhood; the other road leads to disintegration of human society and perhaps even death of civilization. The choices before us are stark. Yet, those who have faith in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother know that eventual victory is assured. The present period is a period of darkness before the golden Dawn.

I will first describe the forces that propel us towards greater human unity, then describe the forces that lead us away from human unity and finally trace the vision of Sri Aurobindo in regards to the prospects for human unity.

MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO HUMAN UNITY

Material circumstances leading to human unity have never been better. The globe is more inter-connected, more tied together than ever before. Many factors weave us together as a one human race. Consider the following five.

(1) English Language has achieved the status of a working international language. Everyone around the globe does not of course speak English, but one can now get along in the English language almost anywhere in the world. The business, political and academic elite in many countries communicates in English. China, Japan and Russia are making big strides in spreading the knowledge of English amongst their people. Because the Far Eastern languages are far removed in structure from the English language, the Chinese and the Japanese have a particularly tedious time in learning the English. In contrast, Indians have a relatively easier time learning the English language. Two reasons account for this difference. The British ruled India for some 200 years (1757-1947). The Indian languages and English belong to the Indo-European language family and thus share many similar characteristics.

(2) Physical distances have greatly shrunk. In less than a century, we have progressed from walking on foot to riding on bicycles to automobiles and now to travel by jet planes. For me, the progress from walking on foot to jet travel has been achieved in one life time. You will excuse a personal illustration. As a child, I walked over one-and-a-half miles to a village primary school in the state of Punjab (1940s). The nearest high school and college were available in a town 5 miles away. The bicycle made it possible for me to attend high school and college. My father completed only 6 grades because the bicycle was not around when he was growing up. My older brother did not finish high school for the same reason. The bicycle arrived for the common person in rural Punjab just when I was growing up. My college education helped connect me with the rest of the world. At the small provincial college, I read Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Shelley, Wadsworth and Bernard Shaw. I also read Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Rousseau. I can say without exaggeration, that if it were not for
the bicycle, I would not have completed college and come to the US. What applies to me applies to thousands of other rural kids in India. Small technological advances have great social and political impact.

While traveling recently on a jet plane, I read that the bicycle is the most efficient means of transportation. One spends quarter of the calories covering the same distance on a bicycle as by walking. The bicycle is also pollution free and is great for health.

In order to save money, I traveled by boat from India to the United States and it took me nearly a month to complete this journey (1963). Today it takes less than 24 hours to make the same journey by airplane. The boat that brought me to the U.S. was most likely one of the last such boats. People do not traverse continents on boats anymore. The pace of change in modes of travel over the past fifty years has been truly phenomenal.

(3) A democratic revolution has engulfed the globe. Out of 200 countries in the world, 119 have been classified as at least partly democratic in the Freedom House survey. This is the largest number of functioning democratic regimes in history. Competing political ideologies such as fascism and communism have been defeated. Two areas where democracy has not established firm roots include China and the Islamic world. Radical Islam poses the greatest challenge to the establishment of democratic institutions at the present time.

The spread of democratic institutions around the globe has obvious implication for the ideal of human unity. Democratic countries are less likely to go to war with one another. Political Science research may be cited in support of the “democratic peace” thesis.

(4) A development with large implication for human unity is the computer based Internet revolution. The Internet technology is very cheap and hence growing rapidly. A computer costs about $500 presently and a mere $20 per month fee for the Internet service. It costs no more now to send a message to India or China as it costs to send it next door.

Computers are a democratizing force in the globe. During my travels in India, I find that Internet cafes have opened up even in small rural townships. The cost of using the Internet in India is mere $1 per hour, in some places even cheaper than that. What is true for India must also be true for other developing countries. Whereas India and the US are far apart in the standard of living that people enjoy, the two countries are not far apart in the use of computer technology. For example, an average American lives in a bigger air-conditioned home and owns a bigger and newer car than an average person in India. But people use the same computers and the same software programs in the two countries. Because computers cost so little money, they are an equalizing force between the rich and the poor countries in the world.

(5) Walls separating one country from another have been lowered. Millions of people now work and live in foreign countries. For example, people from every part of the world now live in America. Some call America “a global nation,” meaning that all national, ethnic and religious groups have chosen to live in the United States. Indian Americans like myself numbered 1.7 million in the census of 2000; this number is closer to 2 million in 2003.
On the other side of the globe, Pondicherry in South India is an international city. Sri Aurobindo Ashram (a spiritual community) located there attracts visitors from around the globe and some have settled in the vicinity of the Ashram. I was told that 48 different languages are spoken around Sri Aurobindo Ashram. I learned Sanskrit from a 20-year old girl who spoke five languages: Hindi, Bengali, French, English and Sanskrit.

About ten miles from the Ashram is the township of Auroville. Auroville which means the City of Dawn is an evolving international community, self-conscious of its mission to build human unity. Its 2000 plus residents belong to some 30 different countries. Founded by the Mother (Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual collaborator) in 1968, Auroville is recognized by UNESCO as an international community. Auroville’s charter includes the following statement of principle:

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring toward future realizations.

Clearly, many material factors foster human unity. Sri Aurobindo was ahead of his times and foresaw the coming human unity. Before the jet plane, before the age of the automobile, before the computer and the Internet revolution, Shri Aurobindo wrote in 1915-19:

. . . this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country. --*The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 280

COUNTERVAILING FORCES

There are countervailing forces operating in the globe that seek to divide the earth and push back the prospects for human unity. I will list three such forces.

(1) Ethnic, racial and religious strife has gained strength in the world in the last few decades. Sectarian violence now afflicts many societies, including Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Burma, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Germany, France, Northern Ireland, the United States, and the continent of Africa. The list can be expanded.

“The clash of civilizations” thesis developed by Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard University has gained wide circulation. Seven or eight major civilizations are identified
by Professor Huntington, including the Western, the Islamic, the Confucian, the Hindu, the Japanese, the Slavic, the Latin American, and the African. According to Huntington, the old ideological conflict between capitalism and communism, or between the less developed and the more developed countries has subsided. Instead, conflict among members belonging to different civilizations has mushroomed around the globe. Conflict is most virulent at civilizations “fault lines,” the regions where two or more civilizations come into physical contact with each other. The Balkans region, the Palestine territory and Kashmir are examples of such fault lines. Three civilization groups meet in the Balkan region: the Slavic, the Western and the Islamic. This explains the turbulent nature of the Balkan politics in the closing decades of the 20th century. The Islamic and the Jewish civilizations (part of the Western civilization) confront each other in the Palestine region. In Kashmir, Hindu India confronts Islamic Pakistan.

The events of 9/11 prove that members of one civilization do not have to live in proximity to members of another civilization to pose threat. Airplanes and missiles have narrowed the physical distance.

Militant Islam today poses the biggest threat to international peace. Radical Muslims are engaged in acts of terrorism against members of other civilizations in some 20 places around the globe. Examine below the list of groups against whom radical Muslims wage war:

- Roman Catholics on Mindanao in the Philippines
- Roman Catholics on Timor in Indonesia
- Confucians and Buddhists in Singapore and Malaysia
- Hindus in Bangladesh
- Hindus in India including Kashmir
- Russian Orthodox Catholics in Chechnya
- Armenian Christians in Nagorno-Karabakh
- Maronite Christians in Lebanon
- Jews in Israel and in all other places
- Animists and Christians in Sudan
- Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Eritrea
- Greek Orthodox Catholics in Cyprus
- Slavs in Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania
- Coptic Christians in Egypt
- Ibos in Nigeria
- the United States
- Moderate Islamic Regimes in Egypt, Jordan and Turkey

(2) Nuclear war between nations leading to mass destruction of people is a threat to the prospects for human unity. The Cold War is over and the US and the USSR no longer point their nuclear arsenal at each other. Yet, global nuclear hot spots remain; the number of countries in possession of nuclear weapons continues to increase. If these weapons are used, humanity will suffer mass annihilation if indeed it can manage to avoid total destruction.
The gap between the rich and poor countries is ominous for the ideal of human unity. A house divided against itself cannot stand. You cannot bring peace in the world where one part is rich and wasteful and the other part is poor and destitute. The economic gap between nations unfortunately is widening; the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, in relation to each other. The economic division of the globe between super rich and extremely poor countries presents an ugly and obscene picture. Note for example that overeating is a major source of ill health in the United States. In contrast, children starve for lack of food in poor countries. The large economic disparity in the world strikes at the very root of the ideal of human unity.

In summary, the widespread use of the English language, the Internet revolution, the movement of people across national borders, all work to bring about greater human unity. On the other hand, certain countervailing forces described above work against the prospect for human unity.

SRI AUROBINDO ON HUMAN UNITY

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a mystic, poet and philosopher. Writing some 90 years ago in 1914-1919, Sri Aurobindo observed that the ideal of human unity is Nature’s intent, for the notion of such a unity has been put forth in front of man.

Today the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our consciousness. The emergence of an ideal in human thought is always the sign of an intention in Nature, but not always of an intention to accomplish; sometimes it indicates only an attempt which is predestined to temporary failure. For Nature is slow and patient in her methods. She takes up ideas and half carries them out, then drops them by the wayside to resume them in some future era with a better combination. She tempts humanity, her thinking instrument, and tests how far it is ready for the harmony she has imagined; she allows and incites man to attempt and fail, so that he may learn and succeed better another time. Still the ideal, having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country. -- *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Page 280

The ideal of human unity is nature’s intent but our first attempts at unity may fail. The League of Nations founded in 1919 after the Great War failed in its initial attempt to build human unity. The League was a loose confederation of 40 member states. Even though President Woodrow Wilson spearheaded the creation of the League of Nations, the U.S. Senate rejected membership in the League. Germany withdrew from the League after Hitler came to power in 1932. The League of Nations could not prevent Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1937. The League failed badly in preventing overt aggression and in maintaining international peace and soon it withered away.
The United Nations Organization succeeded the League in 1945 with the signing of the UN Charter by 50 member countries. The membership has grown to nearly 200 at the close of the 20th Century. The UN has a mixed record in maintaining international peace. Although the world has been spared a nuclear holocaust, small scale wars have been common. Examples include the Korean War, the Indochinese war, the war between India and Pakistan, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Nigerian civil war.

The 20th century has been a bloody century. In addition to the millions who died during WWI (20 million) and WWII (40 million), the human race has suffered genocidal programs at the hands of certain tyrants. The Nazi war machine burned not only 6 million Jews but also millions of Gypsies, the Polish intelligentsia and Russian POWs (17 million total). Stalin and Mao both outdid Hitler in the number of people liquidated in their campaigns to root out any opposition to their regimes (30-40 million perished in Russia, and 40-50 million in China). Pol Pot killed and starved to death over a million people in Cambodia and Pakistan’s Yahya Khan butchered between 1 to 2 million Bangladeshis in their 1971 war of liberation.

The human race has been found wanting in learning to live in peace with its fellow creatures.

REASON FOR THE FAILURE

According to Sri Aurobindo, the initial attempts at human unity failed because social and political means were used to foster unity without a corresponding change in heart and mind of the race.

. . . when material circumstances favour a great change, but the heart and mind of the race are not really ready, especially the heart, failure may be predicted, unless indeed men are wise in time and accept the inner change along with the external readjustment. But at present the human intellect has been so much mechanised by physical Science that it is likely to attempt the revolution . . . through mechanical means, through social and political adjustments. Now it is not by social and political devices, or at any rate not by these chiefly or only, that the unity of the human race can be enduringly or fruitfully accomplished.

_Ibid., Page 263_

Couple of years ago, a Bahai student of mine brought me a copy of “The Constitution for the Earth.” In his view, the first step necessary toward building human unity was to adopt a proper constitution for a world government, much like what the 13 Colonies accomplished in Philadelphia in 1789. The point is that when people think about human unity, they invariably think of writing a Constitution for a world government. World unity cannot be built by mere political means without preparing the ground.

World unity can also be brought about by the application of physical force as it happened, for example, under the Roman empire. The collapse of the British, the French, and the Russian empires in the 20th century indicates that the age of empire building is over.
Moreover, the unity brought about under an imperial rule is forced unity which does not last. Mechanical or forced unity leaves all the real work undone. Sri Aurobindo observes,

> It is therefore quite improbable that in the present conditions of the race a healthy unity of mankind can be brought about by State machinery, whether it be by a grouping of powerful and organised States enjoying carefully regulated and legalised relations with each other or by the substitution of a single World-State--be the form of that World-State a single empire like the Roman or a federated unity.

(Such a union) cannot be really healthy, durable or beneficial over all the true line of human destiny unless something be developed more profound, internal and real. Otherwise the experience of the ancient world will be repeated on a larger scale and in other circumstances. The experiment will break down and give place to a new reconstructive age of confusion and anarchy. Perhaps this experience also is necessary for mankind; yet it ought to be possible for us now to avoid it by subordinating mechanical means to our true development through a moralised and even a spiritualised humanity united in its inner soul and not only in its outward life and body. 

Ibid, Page 303

**WHAT IS TO BE DONE?**

The solution according to Sri Aurobindo lies in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual evolution that alone can create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual evolution that alone can override the vital nature of man. It is a spiritual evolution that alone can unfold the law of love.

The law of love cannot be found in the vital instincts, or even in reason, where it can be met by opposite reasoning. It is in the soul that love and brotherhood will find their root.

Sri Aurobindo envisions the birth of a spiritual religion. A spiritual religion does not mean the old type religion based on creed, dogma and outward ceremony. It is an inward turning in the soul.

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. -- *The Human Cycle*, Page 577

A spiritual religion means the realization that we are unified in One spirit, that we are all children of One God.
A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here.

The One Spirit is manifested here on earth variously.

It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of cooperation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. -- Ibid, page 577

Sri Aurobindo continues:

A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence. -- Ibid, page 577.

If such a realization could develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way. The higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realize this truth and seek to develop it in themselves. The truth of the Spirit may then step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible perfection.

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The individual plays a key role in human transformation.

Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognize a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being.

All great changes...find their first clear and effective power and their direct shaping force in the mind and spirit of an individual or of a limited number of individuals.
The mass follows, but unfortunately in a very imperfect and confused manner..." -- *Ibid*, page 231-232.

How long will the transformation take? The answer is not clear. Nature secretly prepares the ground over a long span, and then a miracle like transformation occurs. There are signs that the Old Age is in the grips of death.

I notice that a spiritual awakening is occurring all around us. The spiritual movement is global and is not limited to one nation. There are exceptions and dark areas such as China and the Middle East. Yet, the spiritual enfoldment of mankind is unmistakable. The birth of many New Thought churches in the West is a first sign of the spiritual renaissance occurring in the world. As we are in the midst of a great change happening around us, we do not appreciate its magnitude or its breadth. The 21st century may well witness the birth of a New Age.

The Mother (the spiritual compatriot of Sri Aurobindo) observed in 1960:

> The world is a unity – it has always been and it is always so, even now it is so; it is not that it has not got the unity and the unity has to be brought in from outside and imposed on it.

> Only the world is not conscious of its unity. It has to be made conscious. We consider that now is the most propitious time for this endeavor. For a new Force or Consciousness or Light . . . has manifested in the world and now the world has the capacity to become conscious of its own unity.

I will conclude with the promising words of Sri Aurobindo. The selection is from his epic poem, *Savitri*, Book 1 Canto 4, titled “The Secret Knowledge.”

> Even when we fail to look into our souls
> Or lie embedded in earthly consciousness
> Still have we parts that grow toward the light,
> Yet are there luminous tracts and heavens serene
> And Eldoradoes of splendour and ecstasy
> And temples to the Godhood none can see.

> . . .
> Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.
> When darkness deepens strangling the earth=s breast
> And man’s corporeal mind is the only lamp,
> As a thief’s in the night shall be the covert tread
> Of one who steps unseen into his house.

> 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.

The quotations given here are from two of Sri Aurobindo’s books, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle*, published in various editions by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry.

(This is a slightly revised version of the presentation made at Pensacola, Fl on 16 August 2003)