

the ascent[®]

CFIL's Newsletter | September 2026



*Ascent: An opening upwards, the ascent into the light and consciousness.
" The Ascent or the upward movement takes place when there is a sufficient aspiration from the being,
i.e., from the various mental, vital and physical planes. "*

— Sri Aurobindo



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Month by month, what we are creating together takes shape through small, everyday efforts.

September serves as a quarterly review of our achievements thus far and outlines our goals for the upcoming months. Beyond being the 'birthday month,' we shift our focus toward our activities with our children. We have initiated one-on-one meetings with parents to encourage open communication and support one another in achieving our collective objectives.

The **cover image** of this issue depicts a matrix, or an incubation—essentially conditions under which something grows. This is the theme of the **main article**. As digital technology shapes the conditions in which we grow, are we progressing at the cost of our attention, cognition, and consciousness? Drawing on dharma and the four ashramas, the article explores an ordering of life that prepares us for our changing roles through inner growth and self-awareness.

In **India, that is, Bharat**, Sri Aurobindo talks about how individualism arises when inherited conventions lose their living truth, compelling individuals to seek a firmer foundation through reason, intuition, and their discovery. The passage attributes Europe's vitality to this search while questioning the limits of a civilization guided chiefly by analytical reason, practical utility, and the outward facts of life.

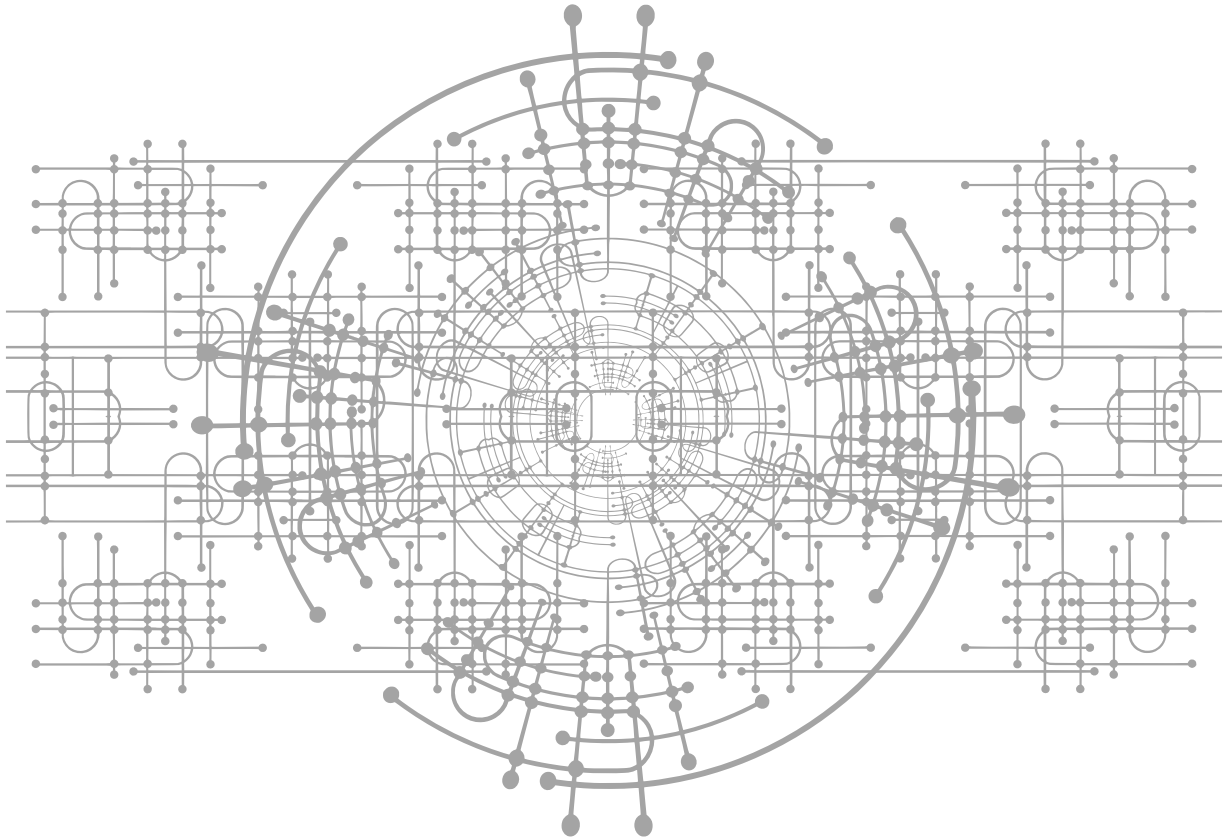
In **Invitation to Notice**—we address the question—what happens to society when seeing and hearing are no longer sufficient grounds for believing?

In **Reflections and Trends**, we explore: As life becomes increasingly urban and managed, what happens to community, autonomy, and our relationship with nature? You will read about what we were up to at the campus in this month of September.

We have begun our planning for sports day. As the month progresses, you will notice an increase in the intensity of our training for sports day. The next few months will demand that we all be in excellent health as we showcase our physical abilities on this day. As usual, we are hopeful that our parents will be supportive and coordinate to make sports day a fulfilling experience for everyone.

—Editor

Growing Up in Today's World



Growing happens under certain conditions. Our lives are lived within an incubation, and incubation means the conditions under which something grows. Another word I have found is matrix. It comes from the Latin word mater. The word "mother" also comes from "mater", which again means "womb". It is a kind of incubation in which something grows.

Let us look at the incubation and the matrix in which our lives are lived, in which individuals, societies, and countries grow. Visualize the entire globe, planet Earth, covered in one huge matrix. What are the conditions within that matrix today? We need not go back thousands of years in history. We can travel back fifty or a hundred years and ask, what did we not have then that we have today? The answer is a no-brainer. It is digital.

A Matrix within a Matrix

We are now entering another cave, another incubation, another matrix within a matrix. It is the world of technology, the mother invention of all inventions, within which we have artificial intelligence and everything else. We have entered the cave, and there is no looking back.

It may be deliberate, scripted, or designed innovation, but it is becoming more like a vector. You enter a huge matrix within a matrix, and it covers you. There is no escape. These are the conditions under which children and adults are growing, if at all they are growing. I have a big question mark there too.



This digital matrix is directly affecting us physically, mentally, culturally, and socially. All of us are hooked to gadgets. There is no denying this. Anyone across the planet, irrespective of a white-collar, blue-collar, red-collar, or purple-collar job, whatever one may be doing in life, is hooked to the internet. There are some interesting studies and numbers that give us a perspective on the kind of life we are living and the matrix in which we find ourselves. An individual spends 6 hours and 51 minutes a day on devices. This is across laptops, mobile phones, and other devices. Of these 6 hours and 51 minutes, 4 hours and 37 minutes are spent on the mobile phone alone. Of those 4 hours and 37 minutes, 2 hours and 23 minutes are spent on social media. This is the global average, which means that in some countries it could be more and in others it could be less.

The so-called Gen Z is spending an astounding nine hours or more on social media. Another study says that we unlock our phones 96 times a day. During our waking time, this translates into unlocking the phone roughly every ten minutes. That is the kind of attention digital technology, the internet, and

social media are taking away from us.

The kind of content we consume is showing a direct impact on the physical brain. Structural MRI scans show that certain portions of the brain are getting affected. The grey matter connected with the executive functioning of the brain is on a decline. The orbitofrontal cortex is getting affected, as is the amygdala, which is responsible for our emotional response. Many other areas within the physical brain are also being affected.

There is something called digital dementia. The more I speak to people, the more I hear about memory loss. We are forgetting things. The impact is already there. Then come the human eyes. In the early 1990s, the percentage of teenagers with myopia was around 20 percent. Today, across the world, it is close to 40 percent. It is becoming a myopia 2 epidemic. Every third or fourth child I see is wearing glasses, especially after COVID. We hardly blink while looking at social media screens, and that puts strain on our eyes.

Our necks, shoulders, and hands are also getting affected. These are not casual observations; these are peer-reviewed studies. It is not looking good at all, and we are talking about 2026. Imagine how it is going to be as we move ahead. Our

lives are now under a cave, a matrix that is increasingly digital. There were changes in previous eras too, fifty or a hundred years ago, but those changes did not directly affect the body and mind as much as the changes we are living through today. What we are facing is unprecedented. This is the kind of matrix we have created for future generations.

At what cost are we making progress?

At the same time, we are very proud that we have evolved and progressed. Digital is what we consider to be progressive living. Words such as economic development and progress are highly subjective.

Have we made progress? Yes, I would say that we have. We are not pessimists who always look at things negatively. There is absolutely no doubt that we have made progress. But I would look at another parameter: at what cost are we making this progress? At what cost is it coming?

I am concerned with human consciousness. Is this progress coming at the cost of our cognition? Is it coming at the cost of our attention? Are we so gullible that we present ourselves to be manipulated by social media feeds and their biases? The number of biases we live with today is far greater than it was many years ago, thanks to algorithms. Our decisions are now being outsourced.

All this is shaping us. Is that growth? It depends on what we mean by growth. To me, growth is becoming a better version of oneself. That is growing. That is evolving. Are we really in that realm, in that ascension?

Digital technology has consumed us, but when it comes to growing up, education, and schooling, the systems have remained static. They are still the same. Can we not have both worlds? Can we not have a better physical body, mind, cognition, and attention, as well as whatever is needed in technology? We can have the best of both worlds, and that is the direction we must take.

For this to happen, we need attention. *Wherever our attention is in life, that is what we become.* An ordering of life is required.

An ordering of life is required

Where would we place dharma in today's time and age? If there were a matrix through which we could measure it, would dharma be at its full strength? Think of the bars that show the strength of a Wi-Fi or mobile network. If it is 5G, all the bars are prominent on the screen.

Dharma had four bars according to the four yugas: Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and Kali Yuga. In Kali Yuga, there is only one bar. Dharma is at its lowest possible strength.

Dharma is that which holds things together. It is ordering and harmony. It helps us evolve and become stronger. Today, that hold has loosened. We can see it through its lakshanas, its attributes: deceit, corruption, and not being truthful. We find these imprints everywhere, in products, services, and human relationships.



The entire focus is on money. When money becomes the guiding force, it sees nothing. Kali Yuga is disguised as money. Anything that corrupts and debases can be found in every institution, in economics, politics, and ordinary public life.

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are not Indian Terms

This Gen Z and Gen Alpha business is not Indian. I would extend that and say it is not Eastern. We do not relate naturally to these terms. Is there a deliberate attempt to generalize cultures across the globe?

A twenty-year-old in Europe cannot be the same as a twenty-year-old in India. Their circumstances, situations, cultures, and upbringings are different. India is a civilization. China is a civilization. Iran, or Persia, is a civilization. These are not countries that are merely a hundred years old.

There is a deliberate effort to uproot civilizations by planting such a lexicon in our day-to-day narrative and media. We are then expected to blend into it. Everything gets standardized and uniformed. It is a measured effort to create one culture and identity by

destroying civilization-specific history and culture.

The Four Ashramas

According to Sanatana Dharma, our rishis organized life into four ashramas. Each ashrama can be understood broadly as a period of twenty-five years: twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, and a hundred. We were supposed to live for a hundred years; of course, it required a certain discipline and ordering of life.

The first phase is Brahmacharya, followed by Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and then Samadhi. To my understanding, this is a beautiful ordering of life. The generational conflict we see today can also be placed within this order.

A child is in Brahmacharya while the parent is in Grihastha. When the child moves from Brahmacharya to Grihastha, the parent moves from Grihastha to Vanaprastha. Their priorities and orientations ought to change. Each phase prepares us for the next stage. Much of the complexity we see today in relationships and roles exists because no thought is given to these phases.

Brahmacharya

Brahmacharya essentially starts at the age of five and goes up to the age of twenty-five. Integral education starts at five and must continue throughout life. We do not go to a gurukul these days. I see many schools using the name gurukul, but there is often nothing of its spirit. Brahmacharya includes physical education: training the body and the cells of the body, developing strength, stamina, and flexibility. There is so much to physical education. It includes vital education and mental education. How does one have a conversation? How does one develop self-control, control the breath, organise thoughts and ideas, develop self-awareness and awareness of others? How does one cultivate courage, perseverance, love for progress, humility, and gratitude? Arjuna was adept in sixty-four art forms. That is what Brahmacharya is about. It is also about leadership, although I do not particularly like the word: it is about how to lead oneself. If the first twenty-five years are not spent developing these capacities, we remain ill-prepared for the next stage of life. If we fail to prepare, we prepare to fail. The remaining seventy-five years are then affected. We often speak only of the first twelve or thirteen years. Add another twelve years. The first phase must prepare the person for what follows.

Grihastha and Jagat Kalyan

Then comes family life and Grihastha dharma: upholding one's duty as a husband or wife and as a mother or father, earning and feeding the family. But why are two individuals coming together? Why are they

getting married? What is the purpose of having a child? Ask anyone these questions, and one often draws a blank. If Brahmacharya has been taken care of, there is clarity. One begins to live with purpose. The ordering of life happens there. That is why each phase prepares us for the next. We then know why we are getting married. When we are clear about why we are getting married, life revolves around that purpose. If we marry merely for the sake of it or take up work simply to survive another day, life finds its orientation around those things alone.

Our rishis were very smart, if I may use the word. When they spoke about work, they said that work must contain an element of Jagat Kalyan. Our work should take care of society. It should uplift the group, the commune, or the society we are part of.

Why did they say this? They knew that without this element we would become self-centered and selfish, which is the case today. We would lose our sense of the larger collective. If everybody loses that sense, we are sitting on a branch that is slowly being cut.

Vanaprastha and Sakshi Bhava

After living the Grihastha phase, one prepares for Vanaprastha, which essentially means a forest dweller. I am not suggesting for a moment that we pack our bags and go to an ashram. This is symbolic.

It means that we begin to detach ourselves from all that we have created: our children, our house, and everything else. We return to the shastras, to *atma-vichara* and *atma-chintan*. It is beautiful because we begin to live the elements of Brahmacharya again.



become students once more but are no longer attached to daily *samsaric* life. This does not mean that we stop doing what is supposed to be done. We simply do not keep talking about it every day. These things cannot become greater than us. In Vanaprastha, *sakshi bhava* takes prominence. That becomes the driving factor and prepares us for the last stage.

The Final Stage

Samadhi does not mean that we sit in one place and stop speaking to people. We continue to do what needs to be done, but we establish ourselves in *samata*. Nothing disturbs us in the same way. It does not mean that we are not interested in anything. We have established ourselves in a consciousness that is ready to take the journey of life to the next stage. I find this ordering of life a conscious way of living. All these stages must happen naturally. There

need not be a forced effort. At fifty, one does not say, "It is done, from tomorrow I enter the next stage." Each stage prepares us for the next. Preparing ourselves as individuals

If the foundation is not there, there is conflict. Parenting is becoming difficult because adults carry so much baggage from childhood conditioning. We have not become anything other than what we were in the previous stage.

If we have not become greater in consciousness, how are we going to guide our children? Our beliefs, conditioning, and orientation to life becomes dominant, and we look at the child only through them. A person who is stuck in life, who is not evolving or growing, cannot guide another person. We have gone through the same phase and now want different rules for our children.

The more conscious and aware we become, the more clearly we know what needs to be done. Social media is here. Technology is here. It is moving towards technological singularity. All of that is happening, but what is missing is the ordering of life within. Without that, all this is nothing. We may provide everything for our children and have all the money, but without inner growth it comes to naught. This is not a pessimistic view, and I am not trying to paint a dystopian world.

But we are headed towards an extremely chaotic future. There is already a divide between what AI and technology can do today and what they may do in the future. What we

see now is only a trailer. Nobody can be sure of what is happening. We can speak of AGI, superintelligence, and all of that, but we must remain aware of the impact on human consciousness at all times. We need to evolve in our roles as an acharya, a teacher, a father, a husband, and human beings. If not, then we are doomed. That is the point I am trying to bring to notice. We need to order our lives. We need to start asking the basic questions. We cannot say that we do not have time to ask basic questions and think about ourselves. We must think, contemplate, discuss and dialogue more. That was our dialogue culture, and it is something we must continue.

-Editor



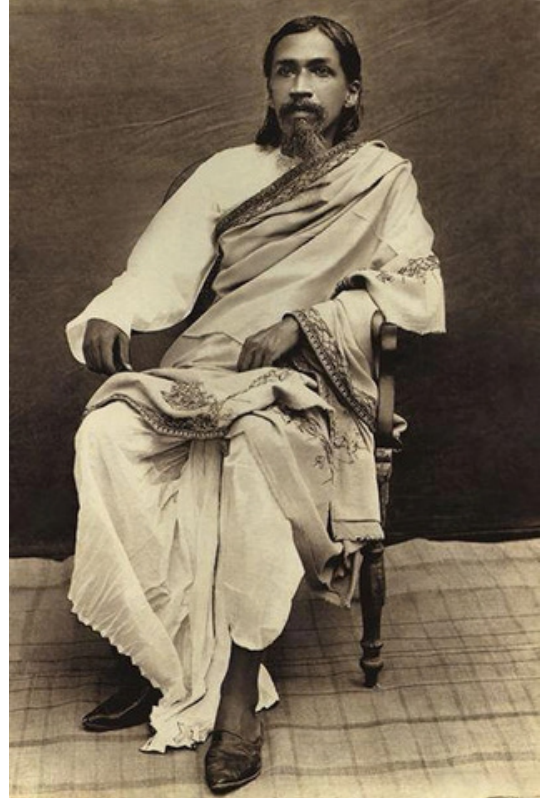
India, that is Bharat - It's Spirit and Mission

India and Her future: Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother

The Age of Individualism and Reason

An Individualistic age of human society comes as a result of the corruption and failure of the conventional, as a revolt against the reign of the petrified typical figure. Before it can be born it is necessary that the old truths shall have been lost in the soul and practice of the race and that even the conventions which ape and replace them shall have become devoid of real sense and intelligence; stripped of all practical justification, they exist only mechanically by fixed idea, by the force of custom, by attachment to the form. It is then that men in spite of the natural conservatism of the social mind are compelled at last to perceive that the Truth is dead in them and that they are living by a lie. The individualism of the new age is an attempt to get back from the conventionalism of belief and practice to some solid bed-rock, no matter what, of real and tangible Truth. And it is necessarily individualistic, because all the old general standards have become bankrupt and can no longer give any inner help; it is therefore the individual who has to become a discoverer, a pioneer, and to search out by his individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire, claim upon life or whatever other light he finds in himself the true law of the world and of his own being. By that, when he has found or thinks he has found it, he will strive to rebase on a firm foundation and remold in a more vital even if a poorer form religion, society, ethics, political institutions, his relations with his fellows, his strivings for his own perfection and his labour for mankind.

It is in Europe that the age of individualism has taken birth and exercised its full sway; the East has entered into it only by contact and influence, not from an original impulse. And it is to its passion for the discovery of the actual truth of things and for the governing of human life by whatever law of the truth it has found that the West owes its centuries of strength, vigour, light, progress, irresistible expansion. Equally, it is due not to any original falsehood in the ideals



on which its life was founded, but to the loss of the living sense of the Truth it once held and its long contented slumber in the cramping bonds of a mechanical conventionalism that the East has found itself helpless in the hour of its awakening, a giant empty of strength, inert masses of men who had forgotten how to deal freely with facts and forces because they had learned only how to live in a world of stereotyped thought and customary action. Yet the truths which Europe has found by its individualistic age covered only the first more obvious, physical and outward facts of life and only such of their more hidden realities and powers as the habit of analytical reason and the pursuit of practical utility can give to man. If its rationalistic civilization has swept so triumphantly over the world, it is because it found no deeper and more powerful truth to confront it; for all the rest of mankind was still in the inactivity of the last dark hours of the conventional age.

At The Integral School

A glimpse into the joyful learning, discovery and creativity that shape our children's days at The Integral School.



MOVEMENT • NATURE WALKS • FUN AND PLAY

Progress & Courage

The children were introduced to new games, movements and exercises this month, although *Ice and Water* continued to be their firm favourite. Their days also included indoor free play with classroom materials, time in the sandpit, colouring, craftwork and drawing their own interpretations of Lord Ganesha.

The festive spirit of Ganesh Chaturthi filled the classroom as the children shaped Ganesha idols and laddus from clay, decorated their space for the puja and participated in daily prayers and chanting until the visarjan. Ganpati Visarjan was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the month.

During a nature walk, the children spotted a peacock and paused to quietly observe its movements. The encounter soon inspired playful conversations and jokes about learning to "speak peacock."

The Courage children also explored mathematical concepts through a variety of engaging games and hands-on activities.

CELEBRATIONS • STUDY • CREATIVE PLAY

Aspiration

September brought joyful Janmashtami and Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations. The children explored degrees of comparison, contractions and story summaries through *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids*. They worked with Roman numerals, Venn diagrams, common multiples and BODMAS through games and crossword puzzles. Tamil word searches, poetry and descriptions of animals strengthened vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehension. In Telugu, the children identified words from short picture stories, prepared lettered leaves for an ongoing craft activity, and were encouraged to notice nameboards on their journeys home in search of Achulu, Hallulu and Guninthaalu. Their plant project involved collecting leaves, recording their characteristics and learning about environmental courage through the Chipko Movement. For Ganesh Chaturthi, they created mixed-material Ganesha artwork, shaped clay idols, and presented songs, dances and a play about how Ganesha received his elephant head.

FESTIVITIES • REFLECTIONS • LEARNING

Gratitude

The month opened with Janmashtami and concluded with Ganesh Chaturthi, bringing together festivity, creativity and reflection. The children selected four Bal Ganpati stories for a play, made props and clay idols, and gathered for visarjan after nine days. They later reflected on the celebration and imagined spending a day with Ganesha. They read and discussed parables from *The Ascent*, explored stories of Krishna and unusual episodes from Ganesha's life, learned about conjunctions and phrases, and used dictionaries more independently. In Telugu, they read short sentences about Krishna, wrote different names of Ganesha and continued their Guninthaalu leaf craft. Mock tests covered Telugu words and English parts of speech. Alongside level-based mathematics practice, they began studying insects, their body parts and life cycles, focusing particularly on ants and grasshoppers.



STORIES • CELEBRATIONS • CLEANLINESS

Humility

September began with joyful Janmashtami celebrations, as Humility and Goodness brought Krishna's birth alive through drama, dance and the traditional matka breaking. Ganesh Chaturthi followed with stories, a spirited inter-group dance and creatively crafted idols made from terracotta, paper and pulses. The clay idols were immersed in buckets for recycling, while origami lotuses, paper roses and handmade torans adorned the celebration. The UNESCO World Heritage Sites project reached its final stage, while quizzes reinforced abbreviations, spellings, multiplication tables, and Indian states and capitals. The children studied the nervous system, reflex action, decimal operations and the Earth's heat zones, presenting each zone's flora and fauna. Decimal division and word problems require further practice. Through the two-week "Mystical Makeover Project," the children also took responsibility for keeping their classroom and surroundings clean until the Dussehra break.

JOY • ENTREPRENEURSHIP • EXPLORATION

Goodness

September began with Janmashtami, as the Goodness girls presented Krishna's stories through a short play and joined the matka-breaking ceremony. For Ganesh Chaturthi, they danced, recited pieces and created Ganpati idols. Goodness and Humility continued shaping "The Garden of Joy"; encouraging children to name and describe nearby plants. Systems thinking activities focused on identification and classification, while their herbarium and science dictionary remained in progress. A mock test revisited earlier learning, and guided meditation offered time to pause and imagine. They explored Buddhism, Jainism, Vedic history and the Mahajanapadas through mapping. For the school's first anniversary, groups collaborated on flower garlands. Their free-time "spa" became a playful lesson in entrepreneurship: children divided roles across marketing, customer service, ambience and payments in kind, collaborated as a team, and even navigated competition when other groups attempted to poach their members.

PRACTISE • PERSEVERANCE • CREATIVITY

Equality

September brought a blend of learning, creativity and leadership for Equality. The children completed a revision of fundamental mathematical concepts and began working on the time taken to solve problems, alongside improving accuracy and reducing errors. They continued learning to approach questions carefully, identify what was required, select an appropriate method and verify their solutions. For Ganesh Chaturthi, both children created a Ganesha painting, bringing observation and festive expression into their art. They also took a role in the school's collective mala-making activity, leading the team and guiding children as flower garlands were prepared to commemorate one year at the new campus. In English, both children began developing their essay-writing skills by planning, organising and expressing their ideas in a sustained form. They completed their essay and took the learning one step further by uploading it to the website. Altogether, the month strengthened perseverance, precision, creativity, responsibility and independent expression.

Humanity Is Becoming an Urban Species



More than half of humanity now lives in urban areas, compared with approximately one-third in 1950. Cities are becoming the primary arenas for economic opportunity, climate risk, surveillance, loneliness and inequality.

As life becomes increasingly urban and managed, what happens to community, autonomy and our relationship with nature?

Source: https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Invitations to notice

The Crisis of Knowing



Global trust in news has fallen to 37%,
while 62% worry about misinformation.
Synthetic media introduces a deeper danger:
authentic evidence can now be dismissed as fake
simply because fabrication is possible.

What happens to society when seeing and hearing are no
longer sufficient grounds for believing?

Source: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2026/dnr-executive-summary?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Omnipotent

om-NIP-uh-tuhnt

/ɒmˈnɪp.ə.tənt/ • adjective

Having absolute, unlimited power.

A Parable



An old potter placed a cracked bowl beside his finest creations.

“Why keep this imperfect one?” asked his apprentice.

The potter filled it with seeds and placed it in the courtyard.

Water escaped through the crack, moistening the soil.

Weeks later, small flowers appeared around it.

“Perfection holds everything,” said the potter. “Sometimes a crack allows something new to begin.”



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