

the ascent[®]

CFIL's Newsletter | July 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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Each new month adds another chapter to our collective journey,

We began July rigorously. We have announced this year as the year of 'rigor', even as we contemplate last year as the year of 'transition.' We intend to make next year the year of 'stability.' This is how we see our efforts on the timeline. We would be focusing more rigorously on whatever we do, whether it's our projects, study, research, physical education, etc.

July was also a month for annual parent orientation. Although we had a reasonably satisfactory attendance from parents, we missed out on those who could not come. The orientation was to share the roadmap until class 10 and also to share the general rhythm throughout the year at the Integral School.

The article **The Diminishing Human** highlights that the human body is a real privilege and emphasizes the need to preserve it to avoid losing that privilege and how we need to preserve it, lest we find ourselves getting lost in the artificial world.

The article **'When the Right Answer Isn't the Real Lesson'** is written by Priti, our parent, and it delves into how, through a simple classroom observation, this article explores why the process of learning often reveals more than the outcome and what integral education can teach us about nurturing the whole child.

Journey through the North is an inspiring collection of bird photographs. We are grateful to Granthali for sharing these images from her travels in the mountains while bird-watching.

India that is Bharat (Sri Aurobindo's writings)—The passage examines how human development is fulfilled not through external conformity but through the inward discovery of one's individual law of being within the larger unity of existence.

In the **Symbolism** series, we explore what we mean by 'humility' as expounded by the Mother.

This July, **The Integral School** offers a glimpse of awe-inspiring moments with our children.

In **Reflections and Trends**, we explore the benefit of physical exercise on the human brain. In **Invitation to Notice**, a shocking data point suggests that we need to do a lot to develop research and innovation aptitude in our people.

We will return in September to share all the enjoyable experiences we had in August. This will illustrate the narrative of our timelines

—Editor

The Diminishing Human:

Can we retain our humanness in the age of intelligent machines?

*Durlabham trayamevaitad-devanugraha-hetukam;
Manusyatvam mumumksvtvam mahapurusasamsrayah*

These are three things which are rare indeed and are due to grace of God—namely a human birth, the longing of liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.

Vivekchudamani-3

If Birth in the human body is a rare privilege among the uncountable living creatures. Manusyatvam—the desire to be free, to be free of all conditioning, and to realize one's essential reality, a merger with the divine—is a human thing. A human being can stand back and contemplate its own thinking; to be self-aware and conscious is a human thing. To propagate the human body and consciousness as limitations, subject to failure and inaccuracy, is to propagate an unfounded conjecture. "The human being is not the final product of evolution; man is a thinking and living laboratory in which nature is working out something far greater than itself—the manifestation of the divine in material form," said Sri Aurobindo. To promote the non-biological human form as the next leap in 'biological evolution' is to limit the scope of being human infinitely. Such conclusions are not only narrow but also reductionist in their view. It is now a battle between Paroksha Jnana (परोक्ष ज्ञान) (indirect knowledge, heard, read, or inferred). vs. Aparoksha Jnana (अपरोक्ष ज्ञान) (directly realized knowledge; personally experienced and verified).

The timeline includes the following key events: 1950 – the Turing test; 1956 – the birth of artificial intelligence; and 2012 – a breakthrough in deep learning. In 2025, AI achieves the human-likeness benchmark, with ChatGPT 4.5 successfully passing it. The Turing test is passed 73% of the time, and this rate is expected to improve. AI is not in us; we are encapsulated in it. We are passing through

technological ambivalence—we are beginning to question if AI is indeed 'better' and 'smarter' than us and are almost 'convinced' that it is.

What really is a human being without attention, without the ability to concentrate, and hardly able to observe life? According to Pew research, 23% of young adults under age 35 prefer digital relationships to human ones. There is a condition known as AI psychosis, where individuals become so emotionally affected that they lose touch with external reality, causing the digital world to feel more real than the physical one. The recommended social media reel duration is less than one minute because people's attention spans are shorter than that. Cognitive load is at an all-time low; this phenomenon essentially means the human brain is not exercising its muscles to think. There is a drastic increase in digital dementia among the 35-44 age group. This phenomenon is giving a "fog zone" experience—where one is lost for words and has vocabulary loss.

Which way do we go now? Are we becoming humanoids, or are we retaining our ability to think independently? Our humanness and our latent capacities for consciousness are natural to us; a progressive unfolding of what we truly are will set us free from the 'AI-technical world' into which we are being led.

-Editor

When the Right Answer Isn't the Real Lesson

Some questions don't seek answers immediately. They linger quietly, resurfacing in unexpected places until experience catches up with them. One such question emerged during a recent parent orientation at The Integral School.

As we unpacked the word Integral, the conversation wandered through the many dimensions of education. We spoke about the body that acts, the mind that thinks, the vital that feels—all held together by what Sri Aurobindo describes as the innermost self.

The discussion eventually arrived at curiosity. and "How do we make a child curious?" someone asked. The session moved on, but the question didn't...

Over the next few days, I found myself returning to it—not so much to answer it, but to understand what lay beneath it. How do we make a child curious? felt like the question we could articulate. But was it the one we were really asking? Perhaps what lingered beneath it was something far more difficult:

*Can there really
be a prescribed
process for
helping
a child discover
their innermost
self?*

We know, to a large extent, how to strengthen the body. Centuries of knowledge have shown us how movement, sport and discipline shape it. We continue to refine how we educate the mind through schools, books, experiences and dialogue. We are only beginning to understand how to nurture the world of emotions.

But the deepest part of ourselves—the quiet awareness from which our choices, values and purpose emerge—does that unfold through a method? Or does it reveal itself in its own time?

Outside my role as a parent, I spend much of my time in classrooms—designing curriculum, working with teachers, and observing learning unfold. It was then that a classroom observation from nearly a month ago came back to me. At the time, it had seemed like an ordinary mathematics lesson. Looking back, it felt as though it had quietly been holding a part of the answer all along. The lesson was on multiplying fractions by whole numbers. The teacher wrote a simple statement on the board:

What does $\frac{1}{2}$ taken four times look like?

There was just one instruction.

Draw it.

No formulas.

No procedures.

Just represent your thinking.

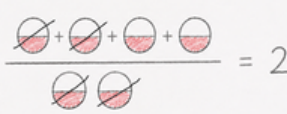
The three responses below emerged.

What does $\frac{1}{2}$ taken four times look like?

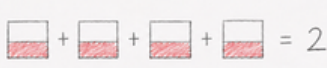
Child 1

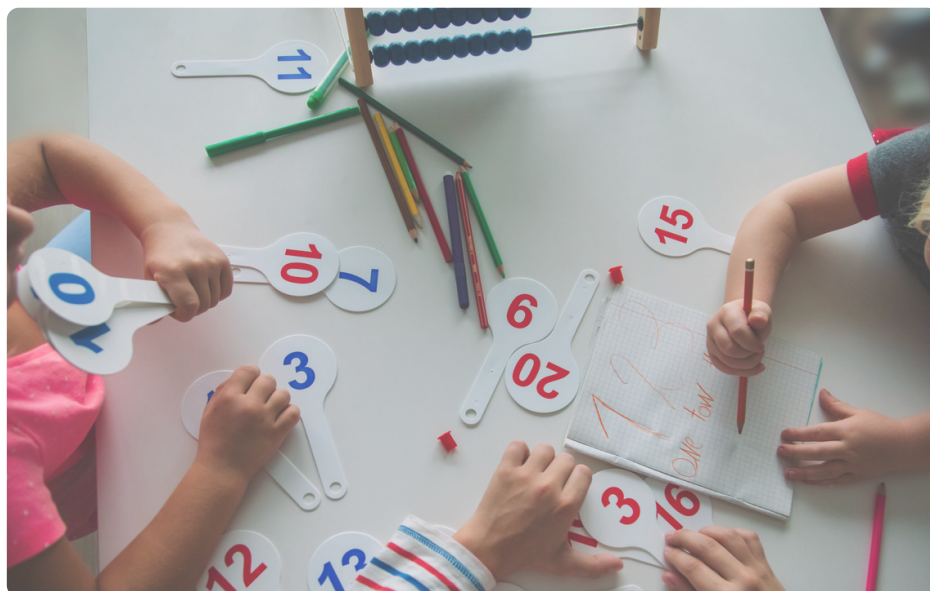


Child 2



Child 3





Before reading further, pause for a moment.

Which child, in your opinion, understands the concept best?

Three children.

One question.

Three remarkably different ways of making sense of the same mathematical idea.

The first child understood *“take a half four times”* but represented four different halves.

The intuition was genuine, but the mathematical language was still developing.

The second child arrived at the correct answer, but appeared to work backwards. The drawing represented something the child already knew procedurally rather than something they were constructing. The third child represented repeated addition itself. The drawing wasn’t decoration—it was the thinking.

From the perspective of mathematics, only one representation fully captured the intended concept.

Yet, as the lesson unfolded, the mathematics almost faded into the background. I had entered the classroom hoping to understand whether the children were learning the concept meaningfully

or simply following mechanical procedures. Instead, the lesson shifted my attention from mathematics to something far more fundamental. The drawings weren’t merely revealing fractions. They were revealing minds.

Like many educators, I have often encountered a familiar question:

“If the child arrives at the correct answer, why spend so much time drawing?”

It is a fair question.

But perhaps it carries an assumption—that the purpose of the lesson is the answer.

What if, for a moment, the purpose is something else?

The answer tells us what has been learnt.

The drawing reveals the path the child’s mind took to get there.

And perhaps that is what education must learn to notice before it rushes to correct. As I reflected on those three drawings, the conversation from the parent orientation returned. If something as tangible as the mind, reveals itself so differently through the very same experience, what does that say about the deeper, less tangible parts of who we are?

Can there really be a prescribed process for helping a child discover themselves?

Perhaps this is where Integral Education quietly shifts the question.

Instead of asking, "How do we make a child curious?" perhaps it asks "What kind of environment allows curiosity to emerge?"

Instead of asking, "How do we teach self-awareness?"; perhaps it asks,

"What kind of experiences allow a child to become aware of themselves?"

The distinction may seem subtle, but it changes everything.

No one teaches a flower to bloom.

We prepare the soil.

We water it.

We make sure it receives sunlight.

The blooming remains the flower's own work.

Perhaps the deepest work of education is much the same. We can create rich experiences. We can ask thoughtful questions. We can challenge the body, stretch the mind, and gently help children navigate the world of emotions. But the moments that matter most—the moment a child recognizes a fear, discovers a curiosity, notices a pattern in their own thinking, or finds a value worth holding—cannot be prescribed.

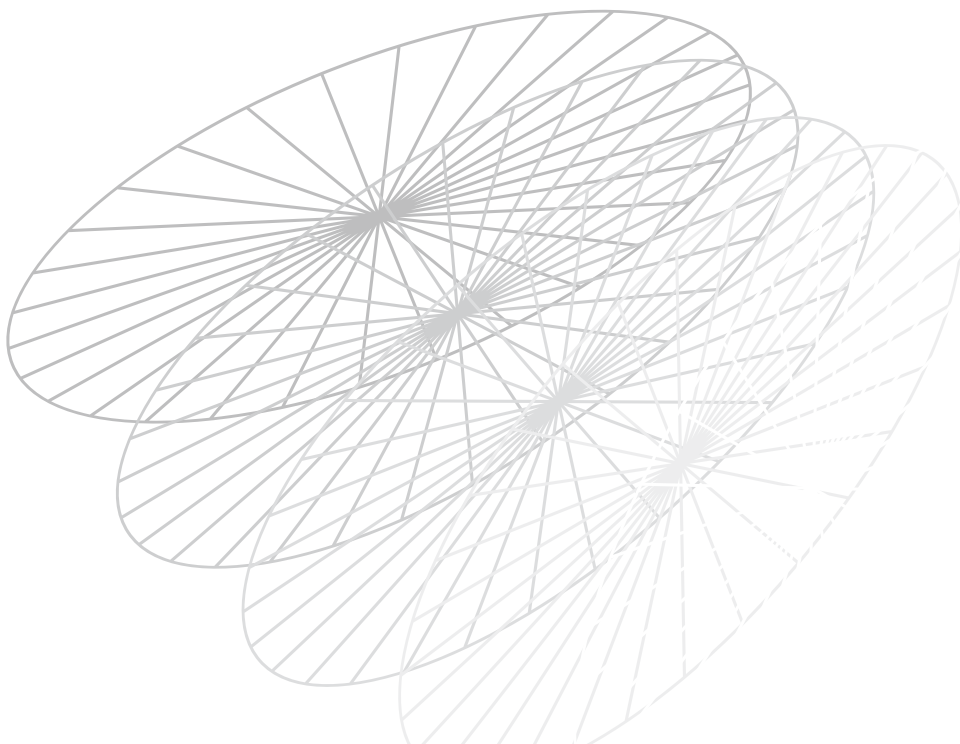
They can only be invited.

Perhaps the right answer was never the real lesson. The real lesson was hidden in the drawings—not in whether the children reached the same destination, but in the different paths their minds took to get there.. And perhaps that is the quiet promise of Integral Education.

Not that it can teach a child who to become.

But it can cultivate the conditions in which each child, in their own time, begins to discover who they already are.

– Priti Seshan

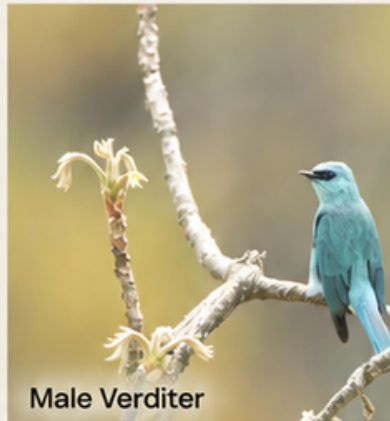


A journey through the North

Captured by **Granthali** during her journey through the mountains of the North, these photographs celebrate the quiet beauty and grandeur of nature. We hope you find them mesmerising.



Himalayan Bulbul



Male Verditer



Red Whiskered Bulbul



Scaly Breasted Munia



Black Lored Tit



Black Kite



Blue Laughing Thrush



Oriental Magpie Robin



White breasted Kingfisher

Photo courtesy: Granthali

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

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



The Ideal Law of Social Development

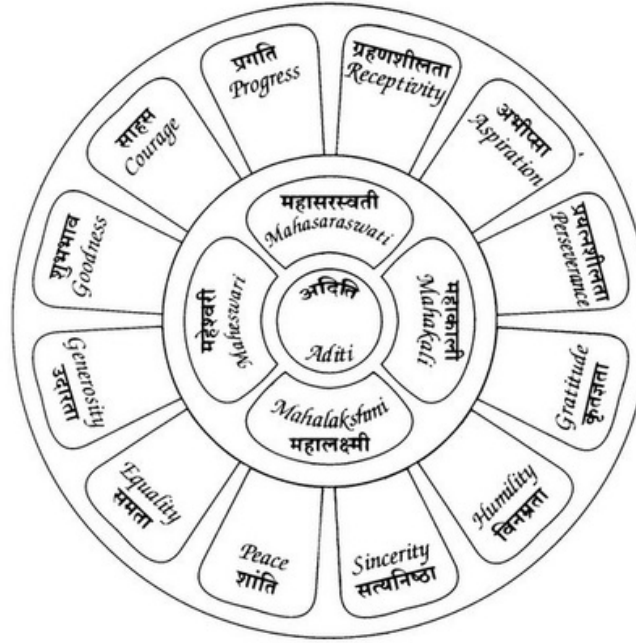
The true law of our development and the entire object of our social existence can only become clear to us when we have discovered not only, like modern Science, what man has been in his past physical and vital evolution, but his future mental and spiritual destiny and his place in the cycles of Nature. This is the reason why the subjective periods of human development must always be immeasurably the most fruitful and creative. In the others he either seizes on some face, image, type of the inner reality Nature in him is labouring to manifest or else he follows a mechanical impulse or shapes himself in the mould of her external influences; but here in his subjective return inward he gets back to himself, back to the root of his living and infinite possibilities, and the potentiality of a new and perfect self-creation begins to widen before him. He discovers his real place in Nature and opens his eyes to the greatness of his destiny.

Existence is an infinite and therefore indefinable and illimitable Reality which figures itself out in multiple values of life. It begins, at least in our field of existence, with a material figure of itself, a mould of firm substance into which and upon which it can build,— worlds, the earth, the body.

Here it stamps firmly and fixes the essential law of its movement. That law is that all things are one in their being and origin, one in their general law of existence, one in their interdependence and the universal pattern of their relations; but each realises this unity of purpose and being on its own lines and has its own law of variation by which it enriches the universal existence. In Matter variation is limited; there is variation of type, but, on the whole, uniformity of the individuals of the type. These individuals have a separate movement, but yet the same movement; subject to some minute differences, they adhere to one particular pattern and have the same assemblage of properties. Variety within the type, apart from minor unicities of detail, is gained by variation of group sub-types belonging to one general kind, species and sub-species of the same genus. In the development of Life, before mind has become self-conscious, the same law predominates; but, in proportion as life grows and still more when mind emerges, the individual also arrives at a greater and more vital power of variation. He acquires the freedom to develop according, no doubt, to the general law of Nature and the general law of his type, but also according to the individual law of his being.

Symbolism

The Mother's Symbol



श्री माताजीका प्रतीक

Humility

There is one thing that has always been said, but always misunderstood, it is the necessity of humility. It is taken in the wrong way, wrongly understood and wrongly used. Be humble, if you can be so in the right way; above all, do not be so in the wrong way, for that leads you nowhere. But there is one thing: if you can pull out from yourself this weed called vanity, then indeed you will have done something. But if you knew how difficult it is! You cannot do a thing well, cannot have a fine idea, cannot have a right movement, cannot make a little progress without getting puffed up inside (even without being aware of it), with a self-satisfaction full of vanity. And you are obliged then to hammer it hard to break it. And still broken bits remain and these begin to germinate. One must work the whole of one's life and never forget to work in order to uproot this weed that springs up again and again and again so insidiously that you believe it is gone and you feel very modest and say:

"It is not I who have done it, I feel it is the Divine, I am nothing if He is not there", and then the next minute, you are so satisfied with yourself simply for having thought that! When people are told "be humble", they think immediately of "being humble before other men" and that humility is wrong. True humility is before the Divine, that is, precise, exact, living sense that one is nothing, one can do nothing, understand nothing without the Divine, that even if one is exceptionally intelligent and capable, that is nothing in comparison with the divine Consciousness, and this sense one must always keep, because then one always has the true attitude of receptivity—a humble receptivity that does not put personal pretensions in opposition to the Divine.

—Editor

At The Integral School



During July, the children of **Progress** and **Courage** Groups settled comfortably into the daily rhythm of the learning space. Outdoor play on the mud mountain and grounds brought movement, joy and opportunities to listen carefully and follow instructions through games such as Out-Out, Ice and Water, and Chain Cut. During indoor free play, the children explored with wooden blocks, train tracks, puzzles and matching games, building imaginative structures and learning to play in harmony. Structured group games further strengthened their ability to understand instructions, cooperate and take turns. Songs and rhymes about numbers, seasons and body parts brought music into their learning, while stories invited attentive listening and joyful enactment. Handwork remained an important part of the month through free drawing with crayons, cutting, pasting, hand painting and stone painting. The Courage Group also began dot-book exercises as a gentle introduction to pre-writing skills.

July brought **Aspiration** Group opportunities for hands-on, nature-based learning. The children began preparing the ground for a mud house by collecting stones, creating a border and working together to pull a heavy roller—an experience in teamwork and perseverance. Inspired by the story of environmentalist Saalumara Thimmakka, they explored trees through nature walks, leaf observation, seed collection and joyful tree hugs. Their inquiry extended to plant propagation, forests, rainfall and the water cycle. They created a nursery with fruit seeds, planted vegetables and celebrated birthdays by planting saplings. In Mathematics, geometry became practical as children measured area and perimeter around the campus. English included prefixes, suffixes, adverbs, dictation and poetry comprehension. Tamil and Telugu activities strengthened vocabulary, reading, writing and letter recognition. Through art, children drew village animals, constructed cardboard huts, practised pencil shading and explored hypnotic patterns and optical illusions, thoughtfully expressing the colours, shapes and feelings they observed.

Gratitude Group concluded its “My Body” Project with an exploration of the human body’s systems. After constructing models of the digestive and excretory systems, each child designed an imaginative creature and considered how its circulatory, respiratory, digestive and excretory systems might function. The group then began its Hut Project, designing huts and surrounding landscapes, measuring dimensions, calculating area and perimeter, and transforming ideas into three-dimensional cardboard models. In Mathematics, children continued practising multiplication at their individual levels. English learning came alive through rehearsals for The Little Red Hen and preparations for a poetry presentation. While studying the poem, children identified verbs, adverbs and adjectives, explored repetition and researched the English names of trees mentioned by the poet. They created props for their performance. Continuing their engagement with Sudha Murthy’s stories, children selected tales, wrote summaries and compiled character lists. In Art, they carefully explored pencil shading, light and shadow.



July was a month of settling in for the **Humility** Group as the children learned one another's rhythms and developed a sense of harmony. Their long-term project on India's 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites began with a video, after which each child selected a site to research and uncover its story. Short-term projects included exploring abbreviations and compiling spellings from Science, Social Studies and Mathematics, reinforced through quizzes. Interdisciplinary learning connected Mathematics with geography as children studied lines of latitude, traced, measured and classified angles, and solved problems using all four operations. In Science, they explored the digestive, respiratory, skeletal and nervous systems through videos, demonstrations and model-making. A cardboard schematic of the digestive system was completed, while work on the skeletal cut-out continued. The group also prepared a presentation of Sri Aurobindo's poem "Who", bringing literature and creative expression into a month shaped by collaboration, inquiry and growing connection.

July brought renewed energy and a fresh routine to the **Goodness** Group. Children participated in physical education and collaborated to coordinate and perform a group play. In Social Studies, they explored the Egyptian and Chinese civilisations, comparing them with the Indus Valley Civilisation. Discussions on the French Revolution helped them understand how its ideals later influenced India's freedom struggle. Their engagement with story-telling through *The Odyssey* in English continued with reading, vocabulary building and exploring Greek mythology. Mathematics encouraged both conceptual understanding and flexible thinking. Children uncovered hidden digits in incomplete calculations using arithmetic rules, explored decimal numbers, place value and operations, and attended introductory sessions on Vedic Mathematics techniques beyond their textbook. In Science, the children began creating science dictionaries and mapping plants across the school campus. Their discussions introduced cells, matter and selected organ systems.

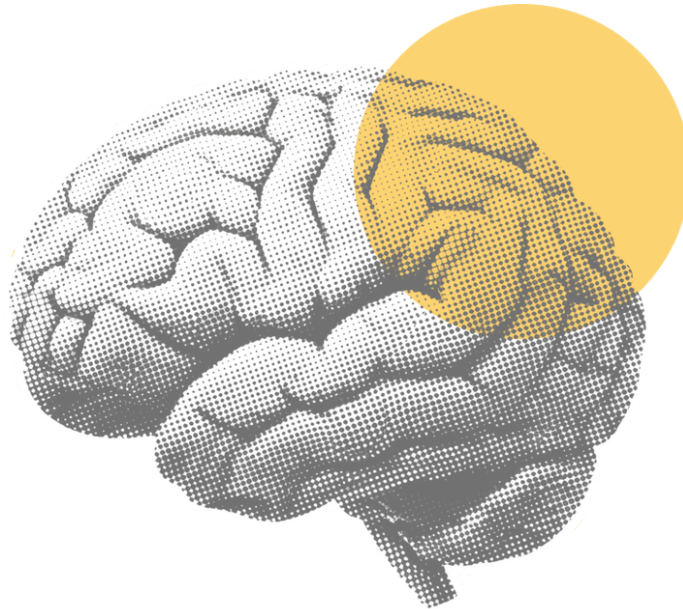
Equality strengthened their mathematical thinking through a range of aptitude and reasoning questions designed to develop logical and problem-solving skills. They also began moving beyond fixed-number problems to generalise solutions using 'n', helping them recognise patterns and apply mathematical reasoning more broadly.

In Science, the children explored forces and motion and delved deeper into the periodic table. English sessions focused on comprehension and essay writing. The children learned how to structure an essay, conduct detailed research, organise their ideas coherently and write at length on topics of personal interest to begin with.

Reflections and Trends

Scientists Find Intense Psychological Differences in People Who Exercise

A massive contrast.



- A study published in Acta Psychologica found that people with better cardiorespiratory fitness are more resilient to stress and experience lower anxiety.
- Participants with below-average fitness had a 775% higher risk of reaching peak anxiety when exposed to disturbing images.
- Regular exercise was linked to better emotional regulation and faster recovery from stressful situations.
- The findings also suggest a feedback loop: higher anxiety reduces the likelihood of exercising, while lower physical activity further increases anxiety.
- Although the study involved only 40 participants and requires replication, it highlights the strong connection between physical fitness and emotional resilience.

One-line takeaway:

Physical fitness strengthens not only the body but also the mind's ability to withstand stress.

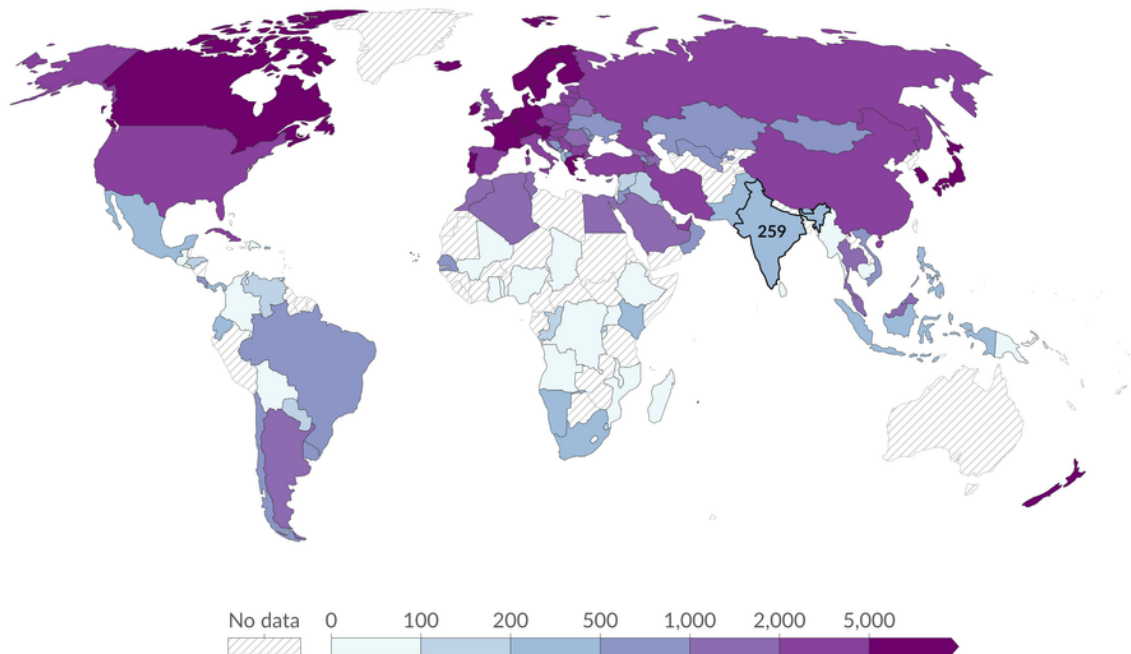
Source: <https://futurism.com/health-medicine/exercise-cardio-stress-research>

Invitations to notice

Number of R&D researchers per million people, 2024

Our World
in Data

Professionals engaged in conceiving or creating new knowledge, products, processes, methods, or systems.



Data source: UNESCO UIS Stat Bulk Data Download Service, via World Bank (2026) OurWorldinData.org/research-and-development | CC BY
Note: Postgraduate students are included.

India ranks 259 per million researchers per million people, why, so less?

Are we busy answering questions? When will we question our answers?

Research aptitude is also to identify problems as much as to solve them.

Consecration

Con·se·cra·tion (kon-suh-KRAY-shun)

Noun

That which is made sacred in offering to the Divine.

(From the Latin consecrare, to make wholly sacred.)

A Parable



A man became furious when another boat collided with his while crossing a river. As he prepared to shout, he realised the other boat was empty.



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CFIL's Expressions:



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