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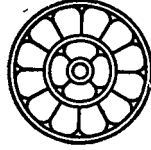
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All correspondence to be addressed to

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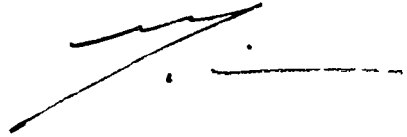


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute.

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



MOTHER INDIA

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No. 7

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

CONTENTS

	Page
THE MOTHER ON SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTH CENTENARY	... 447
THE MOTHER ON SRI AUROBINDO'S WORK UPON EARTH	... 448
SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MODERN WORLD	<i>K. D. Sethna</i> ... 450
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	<i>The Mother</i> ... 463
SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO	... 471
"THE LAUGHTER OF THE GODS": SRI AUROBINDO'S WIT AND HUMOUR	<i>Nirodbaran</i> ... 473
A POEM AND SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENT	... 480
SRI AUROBINDO ON MENTAL AND PSYCHIC DREAMS: SOME LETTERS	<i>From Nagin Doshi</i> ... 481
THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT (A Poem)	<i>Richard Eggenberger</i> ... 483
SRI AUROBINDO AT EVENING TALK: SOME NOTES OF MAY-TO-NOVEMBER, 1926	<i>V. Chidanandam</i> ... 484
PRAYER OF GRATITUDE (A Poem)	<i>L</i> ... 488
EAST-WEST SYNTHESIS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION	<i>Sanat K. Banerji</i> ... 489
REMINISCENCES OF SRI AUROBINDO: A TALK TO THE STUDENTS OF THE SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION	<i>G. Monod-Herzen</i> ... 496
SRI AUROBINDO IN POLITICS (Translated by J. S. Kuppuswamy from the Marathi)	<i>V. V. Athalye</i> ... 503

CONTENTS

THE ETERNAL WORD:

AN ASTROLOGER'S VISION OF SRI AUROBINDO	<i>Patrizia Norelli Bachelet</i>	... 504
RIDE (A Poem)	<i>Georgette</i>	... 512
A LOOK BEHIND:		
SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY ASHRAM DAYS	<i>M</i>	... 513
WHEN THE MOTHER SMILES	<i>Amal Kiran</i>	... 527
AFTER READING SRI AUROBINDO'S "SYNTHESIS OF YOGA"	<i>Maggi</i>	... 528
AFTER HEARING THE CENTENARY NEW YEAR MUSIC	<i>Maggi</i>	... 529
"LEAVES OF ALABASTER" (A Poem)	<i>Gene Maslow</i>	... 530
ETERNAL TRAVELLER		
Based on Two Bengali Poems	<i>Aruna</i>	... 531
NO SELF-BEFOOLING (A Poem)	<i>Har Krishan Singh</i>	... 532
THE MAGICAL CAROUSEL:		
A ZODIACAL ODYSSEY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	<i>Patrizia</i>	... 533
"LIFE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL":		
GOD AND LIFE: THE SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION	<i>Narayan Prasad</i>	... 539

STUDENTS' SECTION

EYE EDUCATION:

RELAX AND SEE	<i>Dr. R. S. Agarwal</i>	... 541
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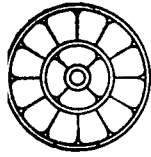
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The best homage that
we can render to Sri Anandabinda on
his centenary is to have a thrust
for progress and to open all our
being to the Divine Influence of
which he is the messenger upon the earth

Belovings. *g. i.*

THE MOTHER ON SRI AUROBINDO'S WORK UPON EARTH

SRI Aurobindo's work is a unique earth-transformation.

Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of Truth. But in between is what he has distinguished as the Overmind, the world of the cosmic Gods. Now it is this Overmind that has up to the present governed our world. It is the highest that man has been able to attain in illumined consciousness. It has been taken for the Supreme Divine and all those who have reached it have never for a moment doubted that they have touched the true Spirit. For, its splendours are so great to the ordinary human consciousness that it is absolutely dazzled into believing that here at last is the crowning reality. And yet the fact is that the Overmind is far below the true Divine. It is not the authentic home of the Truth. It is only the domain of the *formateurs*, all those creative powers and deities to whom man has bowed down since the beginning of history. And the reason why the true Divine has not manifested and transformed the earth-nature is precisely that the Overmind has been mistaken for the Supermind....

The consciousness is like a ladder: at each great epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more step to the ladder and reaching a place where the ordinary consciousness had never been. It is possible to attain a high level and get completely out of the material consciousness; but then one does not retain the ladder, whereas the great achievement of the great epochs of the universe has been the capacity to add one more step to the ladder without losing contact with the material, the capacity to reach the Highest and at the same time connect the top with the bottom instead of letting a kind of emptiness cut off all connection between the different planes. To go up and down and join the top to the bottom is the whole secret of realisation, and that is the work of the Avatar. Each time he adds one more step to the ladder there is a new creation upon earth. The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has named the Supramental; as a result of it the consciousness will be able to enter the supramental world and yet retain its personal form, its individualisation and then come down to establish here a new creation.

Certainly this is not the last, for there are further ranges of being; but now we are at work to bring down the Supramental, to effect a reorganisation of the world, to bring the world back to the true divine order. It is essentially a creation of order, a putting of everything in its true place; and the chief spirit or force, the Shakti active at present is Mahasaraswati, the Goddess of perfect organisation.

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and

never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, the work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world

When I first met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, I was in deep concentration, seeing things in the Supermind, things that were to be but which were somehow not manifesting. I told Sri Aurobindo what I had seen and asked him if they would manifest. He simply said, "Yes." And immediately I saw that the Supramental had touched the earth and was beginning to be realised! This was the first time I had witnessed the power to make real what is true.



SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MODERN WORLD

It is a hundred years since Sri Aurobindo was born (August 15, 1872)—a hundred years of the world at its acme of Modernism. We are apt to think of that century's Master-Yogi and of our science-minded world today as two separate and opposed forces. But the amazing fact is that we cannot understand what one of them represents without understanding what is represented by the other. A penetrating view will reveal Sri Aurobindo not as the antithesis of the modern age but as its very spirit. This age, seen in its many-sided whole, will show itself as secretly Aurobindonian. Sri Aurobindo will stand out as its truth-source and truth-focus, its natural gatherer-up and destined fulfiller.

I

Sri Aurobindo's avowed mission was to lead the world a step further in its evolution—to establish a new status of human consciousness. The old Upanishadic cry—

From Darkness lead us to Light,
From Appearance lead us to Reality,
From Death lead us to Immortality—

may be summed up in Aurobindonian terms:

From Mind lead us to Supermind,
From Man lead us to Superman,
From Earth lead us to Super-earth.

These terms signify not merely transcendence, as in that great ancient mantra: they signify also a transformation by means of transcendence. To climb beyond is not the goal: the goal is to rise above and bring the Light, the Reality, the Immortality of the altitudes to the abyss. A divine faculty of self-knowledge and world-knowledge, a divine power of life within the human mould to discover and invent manifold means of self-fulfilment and world-fulfilment, a divine mode of physical existence ensuring radiant well-being for both self and world: these ultimately are what Light and Reality and Immortality connote for Sri Aurobindo.

But how shall they grow perpetual part of our nature and the world's if they are an omniscience, an omnipotence, an omnipresence pulled down from some supernal remoteness to be made sovereign in our midst, imposed upon our ignorance, our incapacity, our fragmentary finitude? There would be a binding together of contrasted orders of being, the higher holding and dominating the lower, a splendid foreigner from heaven subduing to his own norms and forms the annexed terrestrial native. The

latter would follow a *dharma*, a law, which, though glorifying it, would still be not its own. And sooner or later it would chafe under the brilliant burden and tend to go back to its spontaneous imperfections. The heavenly conqueror would realise the futility of his superimposition on alien earth, and the soul of man, the Upanishadic seeker of Light, Reality, Immortality, would find its hunger for the Absolute unsatisfied by the compromise achieved. It would long to merge in the Beyond, the spiritually Perfect and shun the material scene as a vain lure, a mixture of good and evil which leads to no final resolution. In the end this scene comes to be regarded as nothing more than Darkness, Appearance and Death made colourful by some delusive magic, by what one school of Indian religious philosophy dubbed *Maya*, a mystification by which the Negative passes off as the Positive.

Throughout history the higher thought of man, fired by a vision of Spirit, has ended by a rejection of Matter. Even the most earth-affirming spiritualities have merely accepted the universe of time and space as a drama of test and travail, through which the soul must at last escape. The drama itself has been seen as reaching its termination at some point in the future. Even so cosmos-drunk and humanity-excited a thinker as the Roman Catholic priest-cum-scientist, Teilhard de Chardin, looks forward to a disappearance of his beloved universe at the point where a unified mankind attains its maturity: this point marks a forsaking of the universe by a totalised world, an ultra-human product of evolution: the ultra-human instantaneously becomes trans-human and the whole immense environment of evolution vanishes as something that has served its purpose and grown thereby useless and null.

However, in Teilhard we have the glimpse of a cosmic self-consummation: his ultra-human, his totalisation of mankind, his super-evolution envisage the maximum prospect possible within a mixed context of modern evolutionism, orthodox Christianity and a "cosmic sense" which has profound affinities with ancient Indian Vedanta, fervently deprecated though the affinities may be by Teilhard himself or his co-religionist commentators. And it is with that prospect on the one side and those affinities on the other that we can make a start in general to show Sri Aurobindo to be the very spirit of the age which superficially may strike us as his opposite.

For, what do the Teilhardian prospect and affinities imply? Teilhard the Jesuit, as well as his Church-faithful expositors, may try to explain away the basis he lays down for his spiritual-scientific position, but this basis in its stark shape is nothing except those startling theses of his: "In a concrete [as distinguished from an abstract] sense there is not matter and spirit. All that exists is matter becoming spirit. There is neither spirit nor matter in the world; the 'stuff of the universe' is spirit-matter....¹ If the cosmos were basically material, it would be physically incapable of containing man. Therefore, we may conclude...that it is in its inner being of *spiritual stuff*....² Under the penalty of being less evolved than the ends brought

¹ *Human Energy*, translated by J.M. Cohen (Collins, London, 1969), p. 58.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

about by its own action, *universal energy must be a thinking energy*.¹ Surely we are hearing echoes of the Isha Upanishad's "Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings" and of its further statement: "The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal."²

Teilhard has often tried to take away with one hand what he has given with the other. He has made, in the interests of Christian orthodoxy, fine reservations which sometimes amount to hair-splitting. But again and again, as in our three quotations, the essential Teilhard leaps out.

And there, in his Vedanta turned modern-evolutionist, we have a touch of Sri Aurobindo as he rises from the original comprehensiveness of Indian spiritual thought into his "Integral Yoga" of a divinised mind, divinised vitality, divinised body, a supreme spiritual fulfilment here and now as a result of the evolutionary process which is the master-motif of our scientific age. Sri Aurobindo goes far ahead of Teilhard's understanding of that process no less than our age's understanding of it. And, strange as it may seem, he does so by reading more deeply than Teilhard the scientist the terms in which our age evaluates evolution.

The fundamental stress of modern science is on Matter, and its most idealistic dream is of a plenary human life on a fully organised earth. It never looks beyond the earth and it visions in Matter the seed of whatever highest state man is capable of. A Teilhardian world's end is a conclusion it can never accept, since it would be out of tune with its fundamental stress and the utmost dream of its idealism. A progression within the spatio-temporal framework without any *finis* is its general credo in spite of all threats of a "heat-death" trillions of years hence, and the progression it believes in is not only of a strengthened long-lasting body but also of a more capable vitality and a more subtilised mind. This, at a first glance, is also the credo of Sri Aurobindo. The difference between the two credos, that strikes us on a deeper look, comes of Sri Aurobindo's clearer grasp of what modern science's Matter has really been doing towards the advancement modern science dreams of.

We can best summarise this grasp by means of a paradox: the trend of evolutionary Nature is governed by the logic of the impossible. How does Nature accomplish her decisive changes? What is the persistent problem solved by evolution? Out of apparently non-living, inertly moving Matter there evolves its seeming contradiction: a series of living forms with their activities of response, instinct, desire, organising the physico-chemical. Out of living forms endowed merely with a seeking sentience and at most a practical intelligence but with no apparent thought-power or self-awareness, we find again a contradiction evolving: a body which thinks and plans and evaluates, looks before and after, within and above, as well as senses, feels and hungers.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

² *Isha Upanishad* by Sri Aurobindo (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1924), pp. 6,7.

Such is the story of progression up to now. What shall we expect by the logic of the impossible? Let us look at our own dominant urges differentiating us from the pre-human past and the all-too-human present.

We are in quest of complete knowledge, searching for unalloyed bliss and flawless beauty, endeavouring to possess an all-effective power, longing for lasting health and perpetual existence, crying for a universal unity and an infinite freedom. In brief, we are agog to find a manifold perfection which is a contradiction of the actuality that is ours. And, by the logic of the impossible, we who strive and stumble and, for all our vaunted successes, are still condemned to Darkness, Appearance and Death, are destined for what Sri Aurobindo calls "the Life Divine". Evolution, by its own paradoxical urge, must lead to the emergence of the Godlike Superman.

The epithet "Godlike", having a literal bearing, hallmarks the Aurobindonian hope of the future. But the term "Superman" strikes our ear with the breath of a scientific prophecy; for, it wafts towards us from the closing years of the nineteenth century during which Sri Aurobindo was a student in England. In 1883 Nietzsche, building on Darwin's theory of evolution by "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest", sent out his dream of power and glory into the time ahead and proclaimed his new gospel:

"Dead are all Gods; now we will that superman live...

"I teach you superman. Man is a something that shall be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass him?..."

"What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *transition* and a *destruction*...."

"I love those who do not seek beyond the stars for a reason to perish and be sacrificed, but who sacrifice themselves to earth in order that earth may some day become superman's."¹

A touch of Sri Aurobindo's accent is here, and Sri Aurobindo has himself praised Nietzsche's prophetic fire while laying bare the shortcomings of his Titan Superman, rudely heroic, egoistically grand, haughtily master-racist. But do we not hear in the mouth of this science-inspired rhapsodist an anticipation of Sri Aurobindo's glimpse of a future which achieves the perfection that man the mental being lacks at present—do we not catch a hint of the Aurobindonian "Godlike" when Nietzsche cries out: "What I am not, that for me is God and virtue"²?

The Darwinist dreamer, however, never brought into intellectual light anything like the paradoxical urge Sri Aurobindo disengages in the evolutionary process. This urge Sri Aurobindo names the Yoga of Nature—the gradual preparation for self-exceeding and the sudden leap towards a new phase. But Nature's push to be in "yoke" (which is analogous to the word "Yoga") with the ever higher is from the sub-conscious or subliminal part of living things—until the human phase is reached. With the advent of a self-aware mind, Nature demands that the evolving organism should

¹ Thus *Spake Zarathustra*, pp. 5,8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

co-operate with her urge. Evolution can no longer occur merely by a hidden drive in the midst of lucky accidents: man must set himself to the task. He must freely consent to his own change, collaborate with Nature's trend. And man's collaboration, raised to its extreme pitch, is the Aurobindonian "Integral Yoga", consciously aiming by a concentrated effort of the entire being to accomplish in a short time the results which, with less clear vision and less inward pressure, might take millennia.

Here an important issue arises. Science holds that man, whom Sir Julian Huxley calls evolution grown conscious of itself, can work in unison with the evolutionary urge by exploiting and intensifying his mental faculties. Mind is the culminating stage of earthly development. Teilhard too speaks of "reflection" as the definitive turning-point and the future lies for him in a unification of all thinking units in a sort of super-organism of collective thought or "co-reflection". Teilhard, unlike most scientists, is a mystic by temperament, but his is a mysticism mainly of thought scientifically maturing in integrated world-wide research and spiritualising itself by an ever greater love-inspired concentration of mind on what he terms "Christ-Omega", Christ conceived as a Cosmic Presence attracting evolution to a full mental flowering in the future by His stance as the gatherer-up of souls into Eternity at the end of history. Sri Aurobindo's mysticism is not of reflection sublimated or consummated in a complex universality. It is a mysticism of the supramental. Just as the life-force marks a stage other than material energy, just as mentality forms a level above the life-force, so too the next grade must surpass mentality and bring a power *sui generis*, though not discontinuous with the preceding "planes". The panorama of evolutionary progression expects such supramental disclosure. What the logic of the impossible promises is indeed best comprehended under the aspect of the supramental.

Teilhardism, christening "co-reflection" a "critical threshold" comparable, in its definitive turn, with the critical thresholds of life and mind, would seem to imply a similar aspect. And Sir Julian Huxley appears to incline still more towards it when he dares to look beyond Teilhard's "Point Omega" itself, his terminal state of "co-reflection". This eminent biologist remarks about "Point Omega": "It might have been better to think of it merely as a novel state or mode of organization, beyond which the human imagination cannot at present pierce, though perhaps the strange facts of extrasensory perception unearthed by the infant science of parapsychology may give us a clue as to a possible more ultimate state."¹

Thus from the scientific side there is an approach towards the Aurobindonian Supramental which, in its broad and general meaning, is after all the necessary conclusion of any impartial review of mystical phenomena in the world's past. The phenomena of sovereign genius also lead to the same conclusion. Even what we may dub the "crests" of common experience do so. In a striking passage Sri Aurobindo has summed up the vision of a mind-transcending power whose presence cannot but be attested by psychological facts:

¹ Introduction to *The Phenomenon of Man* by Teilhard de Chardin (Collins, London, 1960), p. 18, fn. 2.

"The intelligence of man is not composed entirely and exclusively of the rational intellect and the rational will; there enters into it a deeper, more intuitive, more splendid and powerful, but much less clear, much less developed and as yet hardly at all self-possessing light and force for which we have not even a name. But, at any rate, its character is to drive at a kind of illumination, —not the dry light of the reason, nor the moist and suffused light of the heart, but a lightning and a solar splendour. It may indeed subordinate itself and merely help the reason and heart with its flashes; but there is another urge in it, its natural urge, which exceeds the reason. It tries to illuminate the intellectual being, to illuminate the ethical and aesthetic, to illuminate the emotional and the active, to illuminate even the senses and the sensations. It offers in words of revelation, it unveils as if by lightning flashes, it shows in a sort of mystic or psychic glamour or brings out into a settled but for mental man almost a supernatural light, a Truth greater and truer than the knowledge given by Reason and Science, a Right larger and more divine than the moralist's scheme of virtues, a Beauty more profound, universal and entrancing than the sensuous or imaginative beauty worshiped by the artist, a joy and divine sensibility which leaves the ordinary emotions poor and pallid, a Sense beyond the senses and sensations, the possibility of a diviner Life and action which man's ordinary conduct of life hides away from his impulses and from his vision. Very various, very fragmentary, often very confused and misleading are its effects upon all the lower members from the reason downward, but this in the end is what it is driving at in the midst of a hundred deformations. It is caught and killed or at least diminished and stifled in formal creeds and pious observances; it is unmercifully traded in and turned into poor and base coin by the vulgarity of conventional religion; but it is still the light of which the religious spirit and the spirituality of man is in pursuit and some pale glow of it lingers even in their worst degradations."¹

Yes, the Supramental cannot be denied and, after a spell of *a priori* refusal, science more and more is being faithful through parapsychology to its typical temper "to prove all things and hold fast to that which is true"—a temper, as these very words that are St. Paul's show, is also at the core of "the religious spirit and the spirituality of man". Where the one manifestation of this temper differs from the other is in relation to the issue: "Does the Supramental already exist or is it yet to be? Is it just waiting in its perfection to unveil its face or has it to grow and get figured forth?"

A number of scientists, carried away by the extremisms of a Matter-emphasising attitude, will not have it that the Supramental is already there, its features discernible at a distance under different expressions in the God of the religious and spiritual seekers. But the thorough-going followers of science subscribe to the principle of Nature's unity and trace life and mind and whatever we may designate soul to the beginning of things, however concealed they may be and whatever time they may take to

emerge in a recognisable shape. For instance, there is the famous J.B.S. Haldane, as representative a modern scientist as one could wish and a Marxist to boot, and what does he say? "We do not find obvious evidence of life or mind in inert matter, and we naturally study them most easily where they are most completely manifested; but if the scientific point of view is correct, we shall ultimately find them, at least in rudimentary forms, all through the universe."¹

This certainly narrows the gap between the materialistic and the spiritual outlooks: we get in science the vision that life and mind and whatever greater power is in process of expression are not late products but co-existent with matter and disclosing themselves with the increasing complexity and organisation of material evolutions. The space still remaining to be bridged between the two outlooks is in the conception of the original state of these powers. Are they really rudimentary at the root of Nature or is their rudimentariness a mere cover? Here the Aurobindonian reading would be: "If, by evolution's logic of the impossible, the future Godlike Superman is in the very nature of things and if already there is a large body of experience testifying to the pre-existence of a Light beyond the mind, then what appears to be in a primitive seed-state, just a scintilla, is actually a fullness covered up and slowly loosed forth under adverse conditions accepted by that pre-existent supramental Light. This Light must be seen as operating both from beyond and behind, above and below, pressing down from the one poise and pushing up from the other. Such a view would best explain the emergence of the higher from the lower with inevitable surety and yet by an arduous and aeonic labour through trial and error, waste and vagary."

Rightly does Sri Aurobindo declare in a succinct appraisal of biological values: "We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental Consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind."²

Involution and evolution—these are the key-terms of the scientific spirituality which we may discern in our age as culminating in Sri Aurobindo. Rather, they are the secret indices of truth in our age as discerned by the help of the Aurobindonian light. That light is the centre of the *Zeitgeist*—nay, it is itself the *Zeitgeist* with a central focus and a various radiation all around—weak in one place, a little stronger in another, suggesting this or that aspect of the revelation Sri Aurobindo stands for: Supermind, Superman, Super-earth. And it is the fact of involution which is of primary significance. Evolution without involution would simply mean a development of higher forces without those forces being at the same time native to the mate-

¹ "Science and Ethics", *The Inequality of Man* (Chatto, London, 1932), p. 113.

² *The Life Divine* (The Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, 1949), p. 5.

rial matrix. With involution, God-realisation would be something essentially inalienable from Matter: it would be no foreigner glorifying earth but earth itself manifesting its hidden glory with the assistance of the un-involved truth of its own being, which reigns as a Divinity in the mystic's Beyond. The great message of Sri Aurobindo is Supermind at the two poles of being: above Mind and below Matter. And such a double perfection waiting to be disclosed gives to modern Science's fundamental stress on Matter its master-meaning; for it ensures the spiritualisation of material existence as no enforced unstable superimposition but as a permanent part of the future because it would be the flowering of a natural *dharma*, a self-law.

3

Not only does the materialism of modern Science attain its *grande finale* in Sri Aurobindo's *weltanschauung* by having the supramental Divine inherent in the very atoms: the spirituality of ancient mysticism also gains a climax by discovering in the supramental Divine an inherent capacity of materialisation, an all-transforming oneness with the very constituents of Matter. And it is by looking at the peak-possibilities on either hand that we come to seize the specific sense of Sri Aurobindo's Supermind. The word "supramental" is for him no blanket term for all that exceeds mentality, not even for all that has been known so far as the highest formula of what is beyond our thinking, willing, feeling, perceiving intelligence—the formula of God as framed by the world's spiritual leaders.

No doubt, the Vedantic vision is most affined to Sri Aurobindo's. India's spirituality stands nearest to him. His base and background cannot be anything else than the triple declaration of the Upanishads: "Brahman is all; all is in Brahman; Brahman is in all"—the essential One who is also a unified Multiplicity and a multiple Oneness. The Vedantic vision is: "An absolute, eternal and infinite Self-existence, Self-awareness, Self-delight of being that secretly supports and pervades the universe even while it is also beyond it..."¹ And in the Vedanta this truth of spiritual experience "has at once an impersonal and a personal aspect: it is not only Existence, it is the one Being, absolute, eternal and infinite."² This Being, who manifests and conducts the cosmos and who at the same time is its multitudinous In-dweller and has various relations with all that is manifested, is Supermind in the directly operative connotation. Indian seers named this Personal Divinity "Ishwara" in general and characterised him as "Satyam, Ritam, Brihat" (the True, the Right, the Vast) or as "Prajna" (the Luminous Lord of the Causal Body) and "Vijnana" (the All-Knower of oneness and manyness). They saw too His Creative Consciousness as Shakti (Cosmic Energy) and "Para-Prakriti" (Super-Nature) and "Aditi" (the Goddess-Mother of the entire manifestation). All this largely rounded mysticism of India's greatest periods in the past is the natural inner context within which the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

² *Ibid.*

Aurobindonian Integral Yoga has grown. But that Yoga moves further even than this mysticism.

For, according to Sri Aurobindo, the high promise with which that mysticism started was not fulfilled. Some secret of harmonising the Eternal's Yonder and the Eternal's Here was missed. Consequently, there crept into the view synthesising the Here with the Yonder the conviction that, however much the former might be irradiated with the latter, the two cannot be completely reconciled. The one has to be abandoned in the last resort for the sake of the other. And, if so, why not turn the last resort into the first? Quite a number of seekers asked that question. And some shadow of other-worldliness fell on all spiritual life. No scripture could be more a gospel of illumined Action and Life-acceptance than the Gita and yet there rings out from it the words: "Thou that hast come into this transient and unhappy world, turn thy love to Me." These words echo in all the religions, no matter if they have a Church Militant or look forward to a Kingdom of God upon earth.

The reason Sri Aurobindo gives for such an attitude even in the India of the Rig-veda, the early Upanishads, the Gita, the Tantric worshippers of the World-Creatrix and the Vaishnava devotees of Krishna the Master of the World-Game (Lila) is: the Rishis and mystics and prophets and saints came to mix up in the Supramental what Sri Aurobindo calls Supermind proper and the delegated Supermind which he more accurately labels Overmind. It is Overmind that up to now has been taken as the supreme Dynamic Divine, beyond whom or rather at whose back we have only the sheer extra-cosmic Godhead—the East's Nirvana (infinite all-cessation) or Nirguna Brahman (qualitiless eternity), the West's transcendent Alone or indistinguishable Ground.

The sign of Overmind's presence and dominance is that multiplicity comes into the front and unity remains in the rear, even though the unity is not lost. We notice, in the world, religion after religion arising, each claiming to be the sole truth; philosophy on philosophy taking shape, each making a world-scheme to the exclusion of the others; theory clashing with theory of government and society. The fact that every one of the opposed formulas tries to embrace everything at the end of its single-track approach gives evidence of the unity at work from behind. There is the same evidence when in a more broad-minded and less religiously sectarian age a movement is set afoot to live and let live—a tolerant ecumenism. Even an attempt is made to bring together all conflicting dogmas and doctrines into a kind of universal Faith or Idea. But still multiplicity rules. Not that multiplicity is unnecessary and should be annulled; the richness of existence would vanish with its going. Yet it has to be exceeded, a new consciousness attained where we do not need to unify in the light of a truth standing in the rear: the unifying truth should be immediate, direct, as much a forefront reality as the many, the diverse, the different. A poise in which to be one is to be many and *vice versa*, a plane where unity and multiplicity are integrally at play, not as factors to be reconciled but as two simultaneous aspects of the identical—such a poise and plane is Supermind proper. In it the fragmentation of things which constitutes the basic problem of Ignorance, Incapacity, Instability is not worked upon from a

certain distance, a certain outsideness, a certain otherness due to the unity being in the background and not level or flush with multiplicity. In Supermind the unity is operative in the very act of the fragmentation, is indeed the self-same force which fragments and creates the many, the diverse, the different that are essential to the opulence and plenitude of manifestation. Thus what is now a mentality questing for knowledge, a vitality pressing towards effectuation, a physicality driving in the direction of permanence, but all of them falling short of fulfilment and feeling some bar of ingrained finitude, would have in their nature itself the power of their own consummation—because they are already the fullness they dream of and grope after. In short, they are Supermind hidden both below and above—Supermind coming into its own through evolution and thus automatically implying Superman and Super-earth.

4

Supermind has never before been reached and explored and brought down into human experience and organised there for a new creation. To make it a part of terrestrial realisation is Sri Aurobindo's mission, and this mission accords by a pre-established harmony with the whole adventure of modern science—the holding of Matter in central focus, the finding of the evolutionary process by which Matter displays Life and Mind, the seeing of Life and Mind and what is beyond Mind in Matter as its inherent capacities. The superficial interpretation of modern Science's discoveries was Materialism. And that interpretation was badly required for a while in order to turn the eyes of man the visionary, the earth-shunner, the spiritual absolutist, back to his earth-mother and make him perceive in her the substance with which the true heaven of an evolutionary creature was to be built.

Sri Aurobindo has said that his early fourteen years in England from the age of seven to that of twenty-one were spent in the heyday of Western Materialism. In that period all mysticism was pooh-poohed as moonshine. But Sri Aurobindo says too that he foresaw the passing of such negative Materialism and the coming of a greater Day in which Matter would have its glorification by the advent of a new Power that would reconcile—nay, identify—the materialist's Here with the mystic's Yonder. He foresaw this Day because the science-tempered modern world was precisely the base erected for his typical work by the same Supermind whose Avatar he was. Materialism was the first appearance of the Supermind below, preparing the ground for the Supermind above to have its feet planted firmly for ever as earth's own divinity. No world except our world today could have been ripe for the Aurobindonian Integral Yoga of total transformation.

And it is not only the theory of evolution that can be presented as proof. Along with it there have been movements of another kind to light up the earth-scene with the subtle presence of Supermind as Matter's own self. The dizzying speed of transport, the lightning rapidity of communication, the almost instantaneous transference of sight no less than sound from place to far-away place—the supersonic jet

and remote-controlled rocket, the globe-wide radio and television network, and all these devices carried to their *n*th power in space-exploration by which the Moon and Mars and Venus become parts of any room on earth—the practical annihilation of dividing spatio-temporal factors: have we not here an accustoming of the physical consciousness to unity and omnipresence, the pervasion of our most external and material level of awareness by the one and infinite? In no other age was the day-to-day outward-looking mind of man suffused with a scientific translation of the mystic's sense of all as one and one as all, the single universal Self simultaneously poised at each point and active everywhere. No doubt, though science attempts to unify the world, knit together the cosmos, the impulsive and sensational nature of the human individual, even of the scientist himself, is an obstacle to its triumph on all the planes of our being. The double action of Overmind is still in force but the pressure of the Supermind concealed behind it is felt more and more. We have only to awaken to Sri Aurobindo to realise what science's conquest of space and time is preparing us for in our bodily existence.

Then there is thermo-nuclear energy. So far the lordly Sun, worshipped from time immemorial as the visible God of the physical universe, stood aloof from us although shedding upon our terrestrial being its golden grace, its power of radiant life and brilliant death. Now with the splitting of the atom and the discovery of the hydrogen bomb we have seized the secret of solar energy and are on the verge of changing the earth's face with the power that keeps the Sun blazing inexhaustibly. The Sun, as Sri Aurobindo has often reminded us, is the symbol of Supermind, the self-luminous creative Truth of the Infinite and Eternal. The "solar splendour", which he speaks of in a passage quoted by us and which he describes as a power of illumination entering our intellectual consciousness by fits and starts at present, has shown its physical reflection in science's thermo-nuclear development. Our age is being prepared to perceive in its outermost dimension the intimate presence of the grandest, the most prolific and productive force in the universe—force that is also light, force packed with potentialities of supreme knowledge. We cannot help recalling those lines from a poetic invocation by Sri Aurobindo:

Rose of God, great wisdom-bloom on the summits of being,
 Rose of light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!
 Live in the mind of our earthhood: O golden mystery, flower,
 Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous Hour!¹

Wherever we turn our eyes in the world today we can see the Aurobindonian Time-Spirit at work. This is but natural since it is the "marvellous Hour" that Sri Aurobindo has concentrated on, the establishment of heavenliness in "earthhood". Has he not declared: "No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish it were.

¹ *Collected Poems and Plays* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1942), Vol. II, p. 302.

It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two."¹ Matter and its labyrinthine depths are the field of Sri Aurobindo's supramental spirituality. If ever there has been a Yogi who could be called a Superscientist, it is Sri Aurobindo. The questioning mood, the experimental temper, the readiness for challenges and difficulties, the sense of objective effect, the turn for concrete practicality are always a part of his Integral Yoga. Quite characteristic is the letter he wrote to a disciple in 1933: "As for faith, you write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work."² Equally typical is the letter of 1932 where he speaks on behalf both of himself and his co-worker, the Mother:

"I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubt—both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more so than any Russell can be. We could never have been contented with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another take for gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic out-going and realising Force. So although we have faith (and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him?), we do not found ourselves on faith alone, but on a great ground of knowledge which we have been developing and testing all our lives. I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane. That is why I am not alarmed by the aspect of the world around me or disconcerted by the often successful fury of the adverse Forces who increase in their rage as the Light comes nearer and nearer to the field of earth and Matter.

"If I believe in the probability and not only the possibility, if I feel practically certain of the Supramental Descent (I do not fix a date), it is because I have my grounds for the belief, not a faith in the air. I know that the Supramental Descent is inevitable—I have faith in view of my experience that the time can be and should be now and not in a later age ..."³

Finally, we may quote a letter in which, while showing how Yoga can bring up faculties unsuspected in one, he makes a statement which chimes most deeply with the surface orientation of the Moderner's psychology, the apparent Godlessness of Matter-obsessed research. Sri Aurobindo, the born Avatar of Supermind, utters his oneness with the evolutionary bipolarity of today when he goes further than his admission that at one time he was an agnostic:

"I had no urge towards spirituality in me, I developed spirituality. I was incap-

¹ *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Collection, Pondicherry, 1953), p. 222.

² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 377-78

able of understanding metaphysics. I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting — I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not. I did it by a special manner not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake, a mere absurd freak of Nature without any meaning or consequence.”¹

The essence of the scientific temper breathes here, in the secular starting-point as well as in the insistence on and pursuit of a method, a process, a systematic growth, in spiritual consciousness, so that all may follow who have the courage, the curiosity and the call to experiment with the unknown and exceed themselves. Sri Aurobindo's non-egoistic, impersonal combination of the scientific approach with the spiritual quest should kindle a like blending in the world today. The Master-Yogi has acted magnificently like a man of Science: the mind of scientific Modernism must realise that harmonious gesture in the cause of evolution and move towards the Master-Yogi for the key to a consummation of its earth-centred idealism. Already on February 29, 1956, about five years after what is regarded as Sri Aurobindo's self-sacrifice (December 5, 1950) the general manifestation of Supermind was announced by the Mother to have taken place at last in the earth's subtle atmosphere—and at present the Mother's body, loyal to the charge Sri Aurobindo laid upon it, is passing through a crucial phase of radical life-revolutionising transformation. The hour has indeed struck for a response by the modern age to the Master-Yogi's work. That is the message of the birth-centenary of Sri Aurobindo.

K. D. SETHNA

¹ Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* (2nd Edition), p. 49.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(This new series of answers by the Mother to questions put by the children of the Ashram appeared for the first time in the Bulletin of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education but in a somewhat incomplete form. We now give, a new English translation, the full text as it was taped with here and there a few special additions or modifications made by the Mother herself at the time of its first publication in French in February 1968.)

June 27, 1956

LAST week I spoke to you about birth: how souls enter a body; and I told you that the body is formed in a very unsatisfactory way almost for everyone—the exceptions are so rare that it is hardly possible to speak about them.

I told you that due to this obscure birth one comes with a whole physical baggage of things one must generally get rid of, if one truly wants to progress, and someone has quoted my own sentence which runs thus:

“You are brought in by force, an environment imposed on you by force, the laws of atavism of the milieu by force...”

And now this person, who wrote to me, asked me who does all that.

Evidently, I could have been more explicit, but I thought I was sufficiently clear.

The body is formed by a man and woman who become the father and mother, and it is they who don't even have the *means* of asking the being they are going to bring into the world whether it would like to come or whether this is in accordance with its destiny. And it is upon this body formed by them that they impose by force, by the force of necessity, an atavism, an environment, later an education, which will almost always be obstacles in its future growth.

Hence, I said here and I am repeating it (I thought I was clear enough), that it was about physical parents and the physical body I was speaking, nothing else. And that the soul which incarnates, whether it be in course of development or fully developed, has to struggle against the circumstances imposed upon it by this animal birth, struggle in order to find its true path and again discover its own self fully. That's all.

Now, if you have something else to ask.... Nobody has anything to say?

Sweet Mother, is it possible for the mother and father, when they give birth, to ask for the soul they want?

Ask? For that they must have an occult knowledge which generally they don't

have. But in any case what is possible is that instead of doing the thing like an animal driven by instinct or desire and without even wanting it most of the time, they do it at will, with an aspiration, putting themselves in a state of aspiration and almost of prayer, so that the being they are going to form may be one suitable for embodying a soul which they *can* call down to incarnate in that form. I knew people (they were not many, this does not happen frequently, but still I knew some) who chose special circumstances, prepared themselves through special concentration and meditation and aspiration and sought to bring down, into the body they were going to form, an exceptional being.

In the lands of old,—and even now in certain countries,—the woman who was going to have a child was placed in special conditions of beauty, harmony, peace and well-being, in altogether harmonious physical conditions, so that the child could be formed in the best conditions possible. This is evidently what ought to be done, for it is within the reach of human possibilities. Human beings are sufficiently developed for such a thing to be not quite exceptional. And yet it is quite exceptional, for very few men think of it, whilst there are in-numerable people who have children without even wanting to.

That was what I wanted to say.

It is possible to call a soul, but one must be at least a little conscious oneself, and then must want to do what one does in the best conditions. This is very rare, but it is possible.

Mother, when a body is formed, is the soul which incarnates there compelled to incarnate in it?

I don't understand your question very well.

The formation of the body depends entirely upon a man and woman, but is the soul which manifests in the child, in the body which is formed, compelled to manifest in this body?

You mean whether it can choose between different bodies?

Yes.

Well, it is very rare, despite everything, in the formidable human mass, that a conscious soul incarnates voluntarily. It is a very exceptional fact. I have already told you that when a soul is conscious, fully formed, and wants to take a body generally, from its psychic plane it looks for a corresponding psychic light at a certain place upon earth. Also, during its previous incarnation, before it passed away, before leaving the earth-atmosphere, generally, as a result of the experience it had in the life that is ending, the soul chooses more or less (not in all details but broadly) the con-

ditions of its future life. But these are exceptional cases. Possibly we may speak about it for ourselves here, but for the majority, the vast majority of men, even among those who are educated, it is out of the question. And what comes then is a psychic being in formation, more 'or less formed, and there are all the stages of formation from the spark which becomes a little light to the fully formed being, and that extends over thousands of years. This ascent of the soul to become a conscious being having its own will, capable of determining the choice of its life, that takes thousands of years.

So, you want to speak of a soul which would say: "No, I refuse this body, I am going to look for another"?... I don't say that is impossible—everything is possible. It does happen, in fact, that there are still-born children, which means there was no soul to incarnate in them. But that may be for other reasons also; that may be due to reasons of malformation only; one can't say. I don't say it is impossible, but generally, when a conscious and free soul chooses to take a body again on earth, even before its birth it works on this body. So it has no reason for not accepting even the inconveniences which may result from the ignorance of the parents; for it has chosen the place for a reason which was not one of ignorance: it saw a light there—that could be simply the light of a possibility, but there was a light and *it is because of that* that it has come there. So, it is very well to say: "Ah! no, I don't like it", but where would it go choosing another it likes?... That may happen, I don't say it is impossible, but it cannot happen very often. For, when from the psychic plane the soul looks at the earth and chooses the place of its next birth, it chooses it with sufficient discernment not to make an altogether gross mistake.

It has also happened that souls have incarnated and then left. There are many reasons why they go away. Children who die very young, after a few days or a few weeks, die perhaps for a similar reason. Mostly it is said that the soul needed just a little experience to complete its formation, that it had it in these few weeks and left. Everything is possible. And as many stories would be needed to tell the history of souls as are needed for the history of men. That is to say they are innumerable and the instances as different from one other as possible.

So, to decide arbitrarily: "It is like that, not like this; this is what happens and not that", this is childishness. *Everything* can happen. There are instances which occur more frequently than others, one may generalise; but one can never say: "This is not possible and it is always like this or always like that." That is not how things happen.

But in any case—in any case—even in the very best cases, even when the soul has come consciously, even when it has participated consciously in the formation of the physical body, still so long as the body is formed in the usual animal way, it will have to struggle and correct all those things which come from this human animality.

Inevitably, parents have a special formation, they are particularly healthy or unhealthy; even taking things at their best, they have a heap of atavisms, habits, formations in the subconscious and even in the unconscious, the result of their own birth,

the environment they have lived in, their own life; and even if they are remarkable people, they have a number of things quite contrary to the true psychic life—even the best of them, even the most conscious. And besides, there is all that is to come. Even if one takes a great deal of trouble for the education of one's children, they will come in contact with all sorts of people who will have an influence over them, specially when they are quite young and these influences enter the subconscious, one has to struggle against them later. I say: even the best cases, because of the way in which the body is formed at present, you have to face innumerable difficulties which come more or less from the subconscious, but rise to the surface and against which you have to struggle before you can become quite free and develop normally. Is that all?

(Silence)

Now, since the end of February, I have received a considerable number of questions on:

How is the Supermind going to act? What should be done to receive it? In what form will it manifest?...

I have answered as best I could. But it happens that in Sri Aurobindo's book *On the Veda* there is a note on a certain page, and in this note he answers these questions. I always tell people: if you were to take a little trouble to read what Sri Aurobindo has written, many of your questions would become useless, for Sri Aurobindo has already answered them. However, it is very likely that people have neither the time nor the patience nor the will, nor all that is needed, and they do not read. The books appear, they are even, I believe, generously distributed, but there are few who read them. Anyway, here is Sri Aurobindo's answer. Try to reflect, and if you have a special question to ask I shall answer it.

Listen:

"The supramental world has to be formed or created in us by the Divine Will as the result of a constant expansion and self-perfecting."¹

¹ This note of Sri Aurobindo's occurs in the commentary on the fourth hymn to Agni in the Rig Veda ("The Divine Will, Priest, Warrior and Leader of our journey"):

"O Knower of the Births,
the man perfect in his works
for whom thou createst that other blissful world,
reaches a felicity that is peopled happily
with his life's swiftesses, his herds of Light,
the children of his soul, the armies of his energy." (*On the Veda*, p 463)

Sri Aurobindo's note is apropos of this expression.

That is to say that to hope to receive, utilise and form in oneself a supramental being, and consequently a supramental world, an expansion of consciousness is necessary, at first, and a "constant" personal progress: not to have sudden flights, a little aspiration, a little effort, and then fall back into somnolence. This must be the *constant* idea of the being, the *constant* will of the being, the *constant* effort of the being, the *constant* preoccupation of the being.

If five minutes in the day you happen to remember that there is something in the universe like the supramental Force, and that, after all, "it would be well if it manifested in me", then all the rest of the time you think of something else and are busy with other things, there is not much chance that it would come and work seriously within you. Sri Aurobindo says this quite clearly and precisely. He does not tell you that it is you who will do it, he says it is the divine Will. So do not come and say: "Ah! I, I can't." You are not asked to do it. But there *must be* in the being a sufficient aspiration and adhesion for the expansion of the being, the expansion of consciousness to be possible. For, to tell the truth, everybody is small, small, small, so small that there is not enough room to put in the supramental! It is so small that it is already quite filled up with all the petty ordinary human movements. One must widen out a good deal to make room for the movements of the Supramental.

And then there must also be an aspiration for progress: not to be satisfied with what one is, how one is, what one does, what one knows or thinks one knows; but to have a constant aspiration for something more, something better, for a greater light, a vaster consciousness, a truer truth and a more universal goodness. And over and above all this, a good will which never fails.

That cannot happen in a few days.

Moreover, I believe that from this point of view, I had taken my precautions and that, when I announced that it had been given to the earth to receive the supramental Force in order to manifest it, this did not mean that the manifestation would be instantaneously evident, and that everybody would find himself suddenly transported to a peak of light and of possibilities and realisation, without any effort. I said immediately that it would not be thus. I even said that it would take quite a long time. But still, people complain its advent has not made things easier, that even, in some cases, it has become more difficult. I am very sorry, but I can do nothing about it. For it is not the fault of the supramental Force, it is the fault of the way in which it was received. I know instances in which truly the aspiration was sincere and the collaboration complete, and where many things which had formerly seemed very difficult at once became infinitely more easy.

However, there is a very great difference, always, between a kind of mental curiosity which plays with words and ideas, and a true aspiration of the being which brings it about that truly, really, it is *that* which counts, essentially, and nothing else—that aspiration, that inner will because of which nothing has any value except *that*, that realisation; nothing counts except *that*; there is no other reason for existence, no other reason for living than *that*.

And yet it is that which is needed if one wants the Supramental to be visible to the naked eye.

And note that I am not speaking of a physical transformation, for this everyone knows: you don't expect to become overnight luminous, plastic, to lose your weight, able to displace yourself freely, appear at a dozen odd places at the same time and what not.... No, I believe you are reasonable enough not to expect that to happen all of a sudden. That will take some time.

But still, simply, the working of the consciousness, simply a certain self-mastery, a control over one's body, a direct knowledge of things, a capacity of identification and a clear vision instead of that cloudy and vague look which sees only the mere appearances that are so deceptive, so unreal—so fossilised. A more direct perception, an inner perception, that ought to be able to come and come quickly if one is prepared.

Simply to have that feeling that the air one breathes is more living, the strength one has more lasting. And instead of always groping like a blind man to know what ought to be done, to have a clear, precise, inner intimation: it is this—not that: *this*.

These are things one can immediately acquire if one is ready.

(*Silence*)

Today I received other questions which have nothing to do with the subject occupying us at present, questions as old as the world, which I have already answered hundreds of times, but still, it seems that nothing has gone in, for I am again asked:

Why do bad thoughts come?

Haven't I told you why bad thoughts come?... For as many reasons as there are bad thoughts! Each comes for its special reason: it may be through affinity, it may be because one exposes oneself to attacks, it may be all that at once and many more things still.

Bad thoughts come because there is a correspondence somewhere within you; else you might see something *passing* like that, but they would not come inside you. I suppose the question means: why you suddenly think something bad.

Because the stages are very different. I have already explained to you that the mental atmosphere is worse than any public place at a time when there is a crowd there: innumerable ideas, thoughts of all kinds and all forms criss-cross in such a complicated jumble that it is impossible to make out anything precise. Your head is in the midst of it, and more so your mind: it bathes in that muddle as one bathes in the sea. And then all this comes and goes, passes, turns, nudges, enters, goes out.... If you were conscious of the mental atmosphere in which you live, evidently it would be a little maddening! I think the personal cerebral limits are quite necessary as a filter, for a very long time in one's life.

To be able to get out of all that and live fully in the mental atmosphere as it is,

seeing it as it is (it is the same for the vital atmosphere, by the way; that is perhaps yet more ugly!), to live in it and see it as it is, one must be strong, one must have a very sound inner compass. But in any case, whether you see it or not, whether you feel it or not, that is the fact, it is like that. So one cannot ask whence bad thoughts come—they are everywhere. Why do they come?—where should they go? You are right inside!

What governs this filter of consciousness, which makes you conscious of certain thoughts and not conscious of others, is your inner attitude, your inner affinities, your inner habits (I am speaking of the mind, not of the psychic), it is your education, your cerebral development, etc. That is a kind of filter formed by your ego, and certain thoughts pass through it and others don't—automatically. That is why the nature of the thoughts you receive may be for you a sufficiently serious indication of the kind of character you have—it may be quite subconscious for you, for one is not in the habit of knowing oneself really, but it is an indication of the general tendency of your character. To put things in a very simplified way, if you take an optimist, for instance, well, generally optimistic ideas will come to him; for a pessimist it will generally be pessimistic ideas (I am speaking very broadly); for a person with a rebellious nature, it will be rebellious ideas; and for a very sheepish person, it will be sheepish ideas! Granting that sheep have ideas! That is the general normal condition.

Now, if you happen to have decided to make some progress and enter the path of yoga, then there is a new factor that intervenes. As soon as you want to progress, immediately you meet the resistance of everything that does not wish to progress both in you and around you. And that resistance is translated naturally through all corresponding thoughts.

Suppose that you want to make a progress in connection with the attachment to food, for example; well, almost constantly there will come to you thoughts particularly interested in food, about what should be taken, what should not be taken, how it must be taken, how it must not be taken; and these ideas will come to you, will seem to you quite natural. And the more you say within yourself: "Oh! how I would like to be free from all that, what a shackle to my progress are all these preoccupations", the more will they come, quietly, until the progress is truly made within and you have climbed a level of consciousness whence you can see all these things from above and put them *in their place*—which is not a very big place in the universe! And so on, for all things. Consequently, your occupations and affinities are going to put you, almost contradictorily, in relation not only with ideas having an affinity and harmony with your way of being, but with the opposite. And if you don't take care from the beginning, to keep an attitude of discernment, you will be turned into a mental battle-field.

If you know how to rise to a higher level, simply into a region of the speculative mind which is not quite the ordinary physical mind, you can see all this play and all this struggle, all this conflict, all these contradictions as a curiosity which does not

touch or affect you. If you rise a step higher still and see the goal towards which you want to go, there will come to you gradually the discernment between ideas favourable to your progress which you will keep, and ideas contradictory to this progress which harm and impair it; and from above you will have the power to put them away, calmly, without being affected by them otherwise. But if you remain there, at that level, in the midst of this confusion and conflict, well, you risk getting a headache!

The best thing to do is to occupy yourself in some practical work which will compel you to concentrate specially: studies, work or some physical occupation for the body asking attention, anything at all that compels you to concentrate on what you are doing and not to be any longer the prey of these incoherent ramblings. But if you have the misfortune to remain there and look at them, then surely, as I said, you will get a headache. For it is a question which must be solved either by going down into practical life and a concentration on some practical effort or else by rising above and looking from above at all this chaos so as to be able to put some order into it and regulate it.

But one must never remain on the same plane, it is a worthless place, both for physical and moral health.

SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO

I

Q: What am I to do in case I do not get the inner guidance when I need it?
Keep quiet and aspire.

Q: What is to be done in case my being falls into tamas and in that inertia forgets the aspiration?

The aspiration can always be kept even in a state of *tamas*.

Q: I get angry and am subject to various impulses of the lower nature.

When these vital movements happen, stand back from them, get detached and regard them as movements of the lower nature, not your own—reject them and call on the Divine Shakti to free you from them.

Q: Is it the right thing for me to create the Mother's form in my imagination and take it as her true presence?

Certainly not. It must come of itself, through aspiration and devotion.

May 27, 1929

(Received through Nolini Kanta Gupta) -

This is a Yoga which does not depend upon verbal instructions or anything outward but on the power of the sadhakas to open themselves and receive the force and influence when in complete silence. Those who cannot receive it at a distance cannot receive it here too. Also, without establishing in oneself calm, sincerity, peace, patience and perseverance this Yoga cannot be done, for many difficulties have to be faced and it takes years and years to overcome them definitely and altogether.

July 25, 1934

(Received through A.B. Purani)

From MULJIBHAI TALATI

Editor's Note

In connection with the fourth answer received through Nolini the sender of these letters writes:

“Last year on my birthday I put the following question to the Mother: ‘Every day I mentally come to the Ashram, stand and pray before the Samadhi, then go to you and for a moment see you. Is all this mere imagination or is it the true thing?’ The Mother’s answer was: ‘If it comes spontaneously, it is true.’”

2

Serpents (like tigers and lions) are not “devil creatures”. They are felt like that by men simply because they are dangerous to men but like lions and tigers they can be perfectly harmless if they are well treated and confidence is established in their minds. They hurt out of fear, for self-protection or out of anger, just as man does. Man can be more devilish than any animal can be as he has shown all through human history. The rest is part of the problem of the existence of evil and suffering in the universe.

September 1934

The heart centre (cardiac centre, not the physical heart) being the “abode of feeling” and the fact that the soul centre is there are facts of experience, not of reasoning. It has nothing to do with the circulation. It is because it is the soul centre as experienced in Yoga that it is known as the “abode of the Divine”.

September 1934

From VITHALDAS M. MEHTA

“THE LAUGHTER OF THE GODS”

SRI AUROBINDO'S WIT AND HUMOUR

To most of his disciples Sri Aurobindo was the Avatar of Supramental Wisdom. To me he manifested himself at first as the Avatar of Supramental Humour. Perhaps he saw that he could catch this ‘medical gent’, as he once dubbed me, only in this way. A masterpiece of spiritual philosophy like *The Life Divine* would be entirely lost upon me. In fact, both Dr. Manilal and I complained of its ‘unintelligibility’. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that since I could not get anyone with whom to study it I would have to fall back upon myself. He replied: “You might try. Read an unintelligible para from the *L.D.*, then sit in vacant meditation and see what comes from the intuitive Gods. They will probably play jokes with you, but what does it matter? One learns by one’s errors and marches to success through one’s failures.”

Every morning when the ‘Divine Post’ came down and I knocked at Nolini’s window for the ‘window delivery’, my heart would leap in joy in anticipation of the manna poured from above. And I was rarely sent away empty-handed. The nectar flowed through a number of years. That made me write to him a bit of burlesque:

“We are not worshippers of you,
But your immortal letter;
We do not worship the dumb blue
But His resplendent Star.”

Sri Aurobindo wrote back about lines 2 and 4: “Good Lord! I hope you don’t imagine that is a rhyme.”

Apropos of this rhyme, let me quote another doggerel of mine. I had asked his permission to have a cane-table. He seemed to have clean forgotten about it. So I reminded him:

“Out of the silence
What is the word that be
About my cane-table, Sir?
Shall I wait till eternity?
Yes or No, do tell me, Sir:
Either of them I can take with surrender.”

His reply ran: “Good Lord! Another! If you rhyme ‘Sir’ and ‘surrender’ you don’t deserve a table but only a cane and plenty of it.”

In this manner my rugged Yogic journey proceeded through the varied plains,

heights and abysses of Yoga, fields of Medicine, Poetry, etc. And he followed me throughout, sustaining me with his sunny humour, his gentle railery, sometimes in a long letter, sometimes in a sentence, a phrase, a word, even a punctuation mark. He invited me to duels, giving me all chances of victory but ending with my 'genial massacre'. On the other hand, if provoked, he almost always took up the challenge and met it either by an elaborate campaign or, if time was short, by a single decisive stroke.

I have used the expression "Avatar of Supramental Humour". If we took into account all the fun in his drama, *The Viziers of Bassora*, in his Bengali booklet *Kara Kahini* on his jail-life, and particularly in his voluminous correspondence with Dilip, Amal and me, I think we would be tempted to say that he surpassed even Shakespeare, at least that he reminded us strongly of the great English poet. It is said of Shakespeare that poetry in him always flowed. About Sri Aurobindo's writings, beginning with his *Bande Mataram* period, the same truth holds. And about his correspondence it is well known that in the early years of the Ashram every night he used to spend on it eight to ten hours, answering at a vertiginous speed the letters of over a hundred and fifty inmates. Now, if all this were written from the mind, it would be an impossible feat. Read all his correspondence, remembering the conditions under which it was penned and the conclusion will be irresistible that no human faculty was in operation here.

Now I shall give concrete instances, the proof of the pudding. Let me start with a specimen from Dilip, who at that time was a great fan of Bertrand Russell. Dilip writes: "I must quote here in full the first letter he wrote, shedding the solace of his humour on my badly hurt head. This happened in 1933."

"You struck your head against the upper sill of the door our engineer Chandulal fixed in your room?" Sri Aurobindo wrote. "A pity, no doubt, but remember that Chandulal's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable: the only thing he forgot was that people of various sizes should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian *objective* point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then this will be brought home to you and you will see that it was quite all right. It is only when you bring in irrelevant *subjective* considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of a stunned head, that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to Chandulal in the morning and get him to do what has (practically not philosophically) to be done. May I suggest, however, if it is any consolation to you, that our Liliputian engineer perhaps measured things by his own head, forgetting that there were in the Ashram higher heads and broader shoulders?"

From my own correspondence I shall choose short letters in order to have both abundance and variety. I shall classify them into General, Poetic, Medical and Spiritual.

General

MYSELF: "You wrote the other day that you had lived dangerously. All we know is that you did not have enough money in England, also in Pondicherry in the beginning. In Baroda you had a handsome pay and in Calcutta you were quite well off."

SRI AUROBINDO: "I was so astonished by this succinct, complete and impeccably accurate biography of myself that I let myself go in answer! But I afterwards thought that it was no use living more dangerously than I am obliged to. So I rubbed all out. My only answer now is !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I thank you for the safe, rich, comfortable and unadventurous career you have given me. I note also that the only danger man can run in this world is that of the lack of money. Karl Marx himself could not have made a more economic world of it! But I wonder whether that was what Neitzsche meant by 'living dangerously'."

*
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MYSELF: "You refuse to be a Guru and decline to be a Father, though ladies especially think of you and call you by the latter name. If they know that you refuse and decline, I shall have to run from one lady to another with smelling salts."

SRI AUROBINDO: "Father is too domestic and Semitic—*Abba* Father! I feel as if I had suddenly become a twin brother of the Lord Jehovah. Besides, there are suggestions of a paternal smile and a hand uplifted to smite, which don't suit me. Let the ladies 'father' me if smelling salts are the only alternative, but let it not be generalised."

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MYSELF: "What does your newspaper say about Abyssinia? Another 'black country' swallowed up by the 'whites', 'prayers to God of no avail'!"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Why all this sentimental fury? This and worse has been happening ever since mankind replaced and improved on the ape and tiger. So long as men are what they are, these things will happen. What do you expect God to do about it? The Abyssinians have conquered others, Italy conquers the Abyssinians, other people had conquered the Italians and they will probably be sat upon again hereafter. It is the law, sir, and the great wheel and everything else. Keep your head cool in the heat. If you want to change things you have to change humanity first and, I can assure you, you will find it a job—yes, even to change 150 people in an Ashram and get them to surmount their instincts."

Poetic

MYSELF: "What poem, you ask? Good Lord! Didn't I request you to compose a

poem illustrating the point I had submitted? If the Guru is so forgetful, the Shishya can be worse."

SRI AUROBINDO: "And didn't I tell you that it was an extravagant and unwarrantable idea to demand a poem for such a grammatical purpose and I kept the *carte blanche* that I might use it for other purposes? What's this Shishya who does not read his Guru's objurgations however illegible?"

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MYSELF: "Last night I tried to compose a poem. It was a failure. I fell asleep over its first two lines."

SRI AUROBINDO: "You call it a failure when you have discovered a new soporific?"

Medical

MYSELF: "A swelling—the size of a cherry inside the nose. The tip is damn painful. I hope it won't leave me with a nose like that of Cyrano de — *quoi?*"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Let us hope not. That kind of nose wouldn't suit either your face or your poetry."

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MYSELF: "My brain is now less hampered by the body's indisposition.

My boil has burst and as you see
From the depression I am free;
Thanks, Guru, thanks to thee!"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Yes, I got irritated last night by your persistent boiling and put a gigantic force which, I am glad to see, burst the little boil.

Thank God for that!
Free from boil,
At poems toil,
Laugh and grow fat."

*
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MYSELF: "The Specialist said that N's eye-condition has improved. He has advised to give salicylates for his past rheumatism."

SRI AUROBINDO: "All right—salicylate him as much as the Ost likes. Queer! one has to be dosed not only for present and future but past ailments. Medicine, like

the Brahman, transcends time."

*
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MYSELF: "Yesterday J's finger was incised prematurely, as pus was suspected, but there was hardly any. Today the swelling persists."

SRI AUROBINDO: "Mother suggests hot water, 1 part peroxide 3 parts water and dipping the finger for 15 minutes. Some of these things are cured by that—it ought really to be done immediately but even now it may be effective."

MYSELF: "Why, that is almost exactly what we have advised him to do from the very start, only peroxide was not given."

SRI AUROBINDO: "You are taking daily almost exactly the same thing as Anglo-Indians take in their clubs, *i.e.* a peg. Only brandy and soda are not there—but the water is."

*
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MYSELF: "Could not touch the patient without making her shed tears. The ladies are thinking 'What heartless brutes these doctors are!' "

SRI AUROBINDO: "Much safer than if they think 'What dears these doctors are, darlings, angels!' "

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**

MYSELF: "Doctor B prescribes butter for my thinness and cod liver oil has been prescribed by myself."

SRI AUROBINDO: "? ?"

MYSELF: "Why two interrogation-marks?"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Butter and cod liver oil—which is two."

MYSELF: "Since the Force doesn't help, I have to seek freshness from butter and cod liver oil. How else to stop being a jutting skeleton? Of course, Dr. B added also cheerfulness to the prescription."

SRI AUROBINDO: "Mother pours scorn on your idea that you are a jutting skeleton. She says that you are less shockingly plump than when you came but that is all. But if you take butter and oil together, to say nothing of cheerfulness, what will you become? Remember Falstaff."

Spiritual

MYSELF: "I hear from a reliable authority that the Supramental Descent is very near. Is it time, Sir?"

SRI AUROBINDO: "I am very glad to hear it on reliable authority. It is a *great* relief."

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MYSELF: "Heard the great news? X singing in theatres! Gracious, fancy that! In theatres and perhaps singing spiritual songs! O Lord!"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Bringing the highest to the lowest—quite spiritual!"

MYSELF: "I am pained when I hear people saying, 'After all, Pondicherry has brought him to this.'"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Why can't they say he has acquired a Godlike *samatā*? Don't you remember the sloka—A Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an out-cast are all the same to the sage? So X can embrace even actors—hope he will stop short of the actresses, though."

*
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MYSELF: "What will be the nature of the physical transformation? Change of pigment? Mongolian features into Aryo-Greek? Bald head into luxuriant growth? Old men into Gods of eternal youth?"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Why not seven tails with an eighth on the head—everybody different colours, blue, majenta, indigo, green, scarlet, etc.? Hair luxuriant but vermilion and flying erect skywards; other details to match. Amen.

"Now you can't surely say that all your points have not been cleared?"

*
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MYSELF: "I am plunged in a sea of dryness and terribly thirsty for something. Along with it waves of old desires. Any handy remedy?"

SRI AUROBINDO: "Eucharistic injection from above, purgative rejection below, liquid diet, psychic fruit juice, milk of the spirit."

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MYSELF: "For this Yoga one must have the heart of a lion, the mind of a Sri Aurobindo, the vital of a Napoleon."

SRI AUROBINDO: "Good Lord! Then I am off the list of candidates—for I have neither the heart of a lion nor the vital of Napoleon."

*
**

MYSELF: "I make the unhappy discovery that it is from a financial pressure that I jumped for the Unknown and Unknowable."

SRI AUROBINDO: "It must have been a stupendous pressure to produce such a gigantic leap.

"All this simply means that you have, metaphorically speaking, the hump. Trust in God and throw the hump off."

MYSELF: "Trust in God? Personal or Impersonal? Tell me instead, 'Trust in

Me’! That would be more comforting, tangible and practical.”

SRI AUROBINDO: “All right, it comes to the same thing in the upshot.”

*
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I think I have given sufficient examples to prove my thesis that Sri Aurobindo is an Avatar of Humour, at least that humour comes to him as naturally as his serious writings. There was a Bengali littérateur who complained that Sri Aurobindo might be a Yogi but was lacking in humour. I hope the impression now will not swing to the other extreme and make somebody declare, “Sri Aurobindo may be an Avatar of Humour but he is not a Yogi.”

NIRODBARAN

A POEM AND SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENT

Seated Above

SEATED above in a measureless trance of truth,
A thunder wearing the lightning's streak of smile,
A lonely monolith of frozen fire,
Sole pyramid piercing to the vast of the One—
Waits Shiva throned on an all-supporting void.
Wing after wing smites to the cosmic sky.
Gathering flame-speed out of their own wild heart—
That tunnel of dream through the body's swoon of rock—
They find their home in this sweet silent Face
With the terrible brain that bursts to a hammer of heaven
And deluges hell with mercies without end.
The abysmal night opens its secret smile
And all the world cries out it is the dawn!

9.5.1948

AMAL

Comment

'SEATED ABOVE' is a striking poem but its violent connections and disconnections—I am not condemning them—have somehow awakened the Johnsonian critic in me and I give voice to his objections here without supporting them. His first objection is to "streak of smile" and he wants to know how thunder can wear a smile, because thunder is a sound, not a visible object. The next three lines are very fine, he admits though he wriggles a little at the frozen fire. He would like to know how a wing can have a heart and wants also to know whether it is the heart that is a tunnel of dream and whether it is the tunnel that finds a home and what can be meant by the home of a tunnel. He is startled by the deluge from Shiva's brain and his own brain is ready to burst at the idea that Shiva's brain is being knocked out of his head by the hammer of heaven. The last two lines elicit his first unquestioning approval; that, he says, is the right union of poetry and common-sense expression.

I don't ask you to take these Johnsonianisms seriously; I have only been taking a little exercise in a field foreign to me; but I am not sure this is not how some critics will grumble and groan under this particular hammer of heaven.

November 12, 1948

SRI AUROBINDO

SRI AUROBINDO ON MENTAL AND PSYCHIC DREAMS

SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

Q: In mental dreams can things, men and movements figure as in vital dreams?

SRI AUROBINDO: They can, but the happenings there have a different less fanciful character with a clear meaning. 1-8-1934

Q: Last night I saw two dreams:

1) *A warrior sends to his son a flower (signifying "Psychic Centre") and informs him thus, "There is a sword with just the shape of this flower on a certain mountain, go and get it." The sword was exactly like that.*

2) *A very beautiful maiden was perceived on a vast sea, raising her head out of the water. Only her head could be seen. She did not appear to be a vital kind of woman. My being looked at her with a great reverence.*

SRI AUROBINDO: The first dream seems to be mental and the meaning, as in all mental dreams, is plain enough in the dream itself. The other is probably from the higher vital representing some part of it with its presiding Shakti. 31-7-1934

Q: I went to X, during my afternoon nap, for some flowers to send to the Mother. He was seated with his usual group of people, telling them, "Z has been permitted to stay here (in the Ashram) for 30 years." Anyone could see that he was much excited with a vital joy. In the dream itself I could feel that he had pressed the Mother for keeping Z here. Then we all entered his room, where he began to pour some tea in his cup. As for my business, he said, "See, there are no flowers, my basin is empty."

I don't say this is a mental dream but it was as precise and exact as a vital dream could ever be.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is of the mental vital expressing X's vital mind in these matters—so busy with vital things like his desire about Z that he has neglected to foster the psychic. 1-9-1934

Q: During sleep does the inner being stop the sadhana because of the commonplace dreams?

SRI AUROBINDO: No. It can go on behind the surface. 31-10-1934

Q: In a dream I saw that it was night and I was sleeping on the mosquito-curtained cot. I found beside my cot some women of exquisite beauty playing. I could not make out if they were angels or goddesses. Their bodies were filled with superhuman light. It seemed they had some rapport with the Divine Mother. They respected me and talked with me,

I forget what, but probably it was about my sadhana and the Mother. A bright light was burning amidst them. Although they were not young they appeared as innocent as children.

SRI AUROBINDO: Probably the dream represented something from the psychic realm.

3-9-1934

Q: In a dream I watched two parts of my being coming out of me. One was of light and the other of ignorance. They fought a duel. I do not now remember clearly who won but afterwards a release was experienced in my consciousness.

7-8-1934

SRI AUROBINDO: It was probably not a dream, but an experience within.

Q: Here is a dream I had during my noon sleep. I came across a lake. In its centre there was an island with a small but very beautiful garden. There stood a fountain in the middle from which water was springing out. I watched it from the brink of the lake.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is probably a rendering in physical terms of some experience on the psychic-vital plane.

16-8-1934

Q: This time the dream was about the Mother's music. All the while I was seated apart from the throng of people and yet in such a place that I could see everything.

After some time the Mother opened her magic eyes. She turned her head towards me and threw only one glance on me for a few seconds—I could not bear it longer, so I bent my head down. I felt a glow all over my body—up to the material layer! It was something more than the touch of a fiat. This time my physical consciousness experienced being taken more inside than above. It was no more bound by the ignorant nature.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is obviously an experience. It is not symbolic, so you can't ask what it signifies—it was a thing that happened, just as on the physical plane Mother might put something on you.

10-9-1934

Q: In today's dream I went to the Ashram Dining Room (Aroumé). Casually I paid a visit to Y. As I was approaching him I felt as if stepping towards a psychic being!

SRI AUROBINDO: His psychic is very prominent.

5-9-1934

Q: A dream: I went to the seashore where I heard a great noise. Then I noticed a big steamer. The noise was due to the taking off of three aeroplanes from the steamer which was on fire. Perhaps they separated from it in order to save it. Strange to say, afterwards the steamer seemed to be all right and already sailing away!

Has the dream anything to do with the psychic fire?

SRI AUROBINDO: It cannot have been the psychic fire because then there would have been no need to save the steamer.

7-5-1934

Q: You wrote the other day: "The subconscious is there, so long as it is not enlightened these dreams are bound to come." I had asked you the question from the viewpoint of Harin's lines:

*Even in sleep-depths I am wide awake,
Thy sweet presence is always there.*

SRI AUROBINDO: That does happen, but usually only when the psychic is in full activity. 27-9-1934

From NAGIN DOSHI

THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT

Now through the long night wander,
Light small, secure within!
Repeat the Name in marvel,
The song of Grace begin.

Companioned or alone
We move in mystic choir,
Each tone a golden vessel
Is filled with liquid fire.

Music, with me find voice
Of harmony through change—
A Master-Note of life
Supports our mortal range.

No trumpet calls to herald
The unforeseen delight—
O sweet inviolate smile,
Break on our timid sight!

Full is this sacred hour
Of a melodious earth.
Thy voice's flute-song, Lord,
Enraptures the flower of birth.

RICHARD EGGENBERGER

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SRI AUROBINDO AT EVENING TALK

SOME NOTES OF MAY-TO-NOVEMBER, 1926

(Continued from the issue of July, 1972)

(These notes were not taken on the spot. They are recollections of the talks at which their author, V. Chidanandam, was present. Whatever in those talks seized the young aspirant's mind was jotted down the next day. Neither complete continuity nor absolute accuracy could be maintained. But, in reconstructing from memory, the author sought to capture something of the language no less than of the thought-substance. In places, later editing has been found necessary in order to clarify notations which had served merely as signposts.)

Q: Some "eminent" men say that the Arya¹ is non-understandable.

They can't understand independent thinking. Mine is not absolutely new. I work out in the light of my experience the ancient thought and then I put it in mental terms. Because this is not the present way of thinking, many Indians cannot understand. To the foreigners the subject is entirely foreign: that is why they do not understand. But I wrote the *Arya* for myself and if nobody reads and understands, it does not matter.

However, many persons say they agree with the views expressed in the *Arya*. It is because these ideas are there in the Universal Mind and come up into their surface minds.

Had I been writing the *Arya* up to now, I would not have made the progress I have made in Yoga. Now, only in my leisure hours I put my new consciousness in writing.

Men generally act from the strongest part of their nature: the senses, heart, emotion, aesthetic feeling or the reason. In any case we have to look into all the elements of the impelling motive by lighting it up with the light of consciousness, purify the senses and emotions of all their dross and act from a clear and harmonious nature. Reason is too rigid and cold: it tries to do justice, but justice is not love; emotion is too warm and generous—see how people like Carlyle appreciate Frederick the Great and how men like Tagore praise Mussolini. The aesthetic feeling too is one-sided: beauty is not always truth. We must harmonise reason and emotion and aesthetic feeling by illumination brought by a higher consciousness. Refined personalities like Shelley, Keats and Goethe were obsessed by the sense of the beautiful. Until we acquire the fine psychic perception of right and wrong, we are not on sure ground.

¹ Sri Aurobindo's philosophical monthly which ran from 1914, to 1921

Even here there are degrees of manifestation of the psychic nature—but always the psychic being has the direct knowledge, the true feeling.

What is generally understood in Yoga as conquest of death is not real conquest. When the Yogis know that the time for death has come because the body has broken down somewhere, they draw up the Prana—the life-breath, the vital force—and prepare to die, as Vivekananda did. But Vivekananda may be said really to have died of heart-disease, even if he made use of the process by which a man draws up the Prana to the Brahmaraandhra, the subtle-physical passage at the top of the head, and departs leaving the body. In our Yoga the aim is an immunity from all the diseases which are the agents of death. We must have the capacity to leave the body when we like, we must not be obliged to leave it by any external force.

Of course, there are other than external pressures—for example, a psychic pressure—which may demand withdrawal from the body. But there too we must be free. Nothing should compel us. And we must be able to leave the body as we may leave a piece of clothing.

One day you may find yourself a poet or a musician. It does not presuppose any previous development. Vivekananda once looked at the first and last pages of a book and began repeating every line in the book. There are untold powers in the subliminal.

Vedantism is too abstract for the ordinary mind. It was the personality of Vivekananda which gave it that drive in America. Abhedananda made an application of the force and continued the work there.

Once in jail I heard the voice of Vivekananda for three weeks communicating to me the knowledge of the Intuitive Mind, which I did not have and which, by the way, Vivekananda himself never had. He dealt with the subject in all its parts explaining everything and giving examples. At that time I believed he was telling me about the Supermind, for I mistook the Intuitive Mind for the Supermind.

Generally the peace you experience is a stillness that comes on the Prana, the vital being. Flowers give that sort of stillness, and it is very helpful for meditation. That is the right state to have in the midst of Nature. All the rest is a poetic response, an aesthetic attitude and activity. Nature induces the still mind. You have to make that your basis and then rise above it.

Q: Does not lying demoralise?

Yes, it does. But if one is to carry on a revolution, one has to conceal things and even lie if necessary; otherwise one would give the revolution away. If you accept to do a work, you must accept the conditions for it. Secrecy is sometimes essential. Gandhi says secrecy is a sin. This does not show the presence of what I may call an

intellectual conscience, which sees the true nature of a movement and does not twist things to justify one's position. A moral conscience he has, but to bring absolute morality into politics is not wise. A few can screw themselves up for some time but the nation cannot be thus screwed up. Our politics should be concerned with India's salvation, not any one person's. Tilak is a true politician. He places the country above his personal predilections.

Politics is one thing and administration another. There are many good administrators in India but no good politicians. Indian politicians merely want to talk. Mahomed Ali, who is Pan-Islamic, is not to be believed in.

In the Indian village there is no life; what life there is, is one man living on the rest. There can be no competition in the villages as in the towns, no public opinion to check the tyrant.

It is interesting to study the rising and falling of nations. Greece and Rome went down after fulfilling their respective functions of giving to the world the ideals of Beauty and of Law. So also England will go down. Her function has been the transference of Government from the Aristocracy to the Middle Class, the Bourgeoisie, the Vaishya and from the Vaishya to the Sudra, the Labour Class. I don't know if England will be able to manage the last transference. After that is done, she will have to relinquish her lead. But India's function can never be exhausted, the function of the spiritual consciousness to lead the world to the Spirit.

The French have the intellectual idea, the Celts have a vague intuition. The English are a mixed product. They owe their finer qualities to the Celt in them.

Khadi (hand-spun cloth), as it is, is not artistic. It is another thing to say that it can be made artistic. I don't say that mill-cloth is artistic either. But when you try to put together things that cannot rationally be put together in an idea—such as "Purity" and "Swaraj", "Politics" and "Religion"—you make yourself absurd. Nobody objects to Khadi being used on its own merits; but why put "Music" in Charkha and "Religion" in Khadi?

It is dangerous to meddle in the world of the spirits without proper knowledge of the subtle and subliminal being, and without strength and purity. If one opens himself to these spirits, if he becomes a medium through whom they communicate with our world—for instance, through automatic writing—he becomes weakly passive to all sorts of forces. All kinds of beings try to take possession of him. The sadhak must open himself to higher forces only and reject the lower.

Generally, all impulses come from the vital being into the mind. We have to

watch them and throw out the lower movements

In Mira's¹ family a young girl of two or three years sang a tune and was saying to herself, "It is the tune I sang when I was a shepherdess in Greece." The memory of it was evoked at such an early age possibly by her fine psychic nature. It is not talent or precocious genius here, but memory.

Physical memory one may not have in a future life, but conscious memory is latent.

The Muladhara chakra at the base of the spine is the centre of communication between the vital being and the physical. It is the basis of physical life. In the body there are seven centres. Above the body there are seven also, and below the body there are again seven.

The body seems to want disease. It is a mechanical habit. You have to separate yourself from your body, and with quiet strength, not by an effort of will which can't do much nor with imagination acting on the silent self as in Coué's system, reject the whole principle of disease from the physical being.

Supramentalising the physical consciousness was not attempted before. It is not mere vital siddhi, special power, like Anima, etc., but an awakening of the physical consciousness and then its transformation.

The idea that diseases are due to a certain type of electrical vibrations and that they can be cured by another type of electrical vibrations that are more powerful is correct. In Yoga, when the higher Power descends, there is an electrical vibration in the system. By that vibration harmony is restored and diseases cured.

There are things in the supraphysical vital world which are both true and false, and one has to distinguish between them. It is full of false lustre and colour which ape the supramental movements. It cinematographs the higher activities. It is full of power but it is all shadow. There is no reality.

In our vital being there are elements of the animal. They may not be personalised. They attach themselves to us in life after life, and enter animals after we die. It is not you who enter animals but an emanation of you.

Something subtle in the vital being gets disturbed and then neurasthenia occurs. The popular explanation of disturbance in the blood or Freud's theory of hysteria is not satisfactory. In every man there is a vital capacity to meet all impacts—impacts from persons, emotions, facts, events. When the protecting nervous envelope is pierced by

¹ "Mira" (earlier "Mirra") was the name by which the Mother was known in those days.

an impact, a disturbance takes place and neurasthenia results. That envelope is the explanation of the influence which people who are vitally strong exert even at a distance. The personal aura is powerful in their case.

Freud's curing of diseases is not due to his theory of complexes. A theory simply puts you in a condition when something behind you can work through you. That is the whole stand of Bergson. A theory merely convinces you and produces the necessary inner condition. That is all. It may be true or it may be false. But the result does not depend on its truth or falsehood. Freud may cure people as Coué cures them. But it is not by their theories that they cure. No. Because they have some power, people get cured.

(To be continued)

V. CHIDANANDAM

PRAYER OF GRATITUDE

SUPREME Mother of my being,
 You have given me a moment-to-moment New Birth.
 Every particle of matter, every cell of my existence
 Has been touched by the Lord.
 I am surrounded and permeated by your soft golden ether.
 All the body's darkness awakes in every pore
 By your touch of Infinite Love.
 I have become one with the Never-ending — the Divine River.
 Your gentle tender caress, your power, strength and might
 Bind me as one curled forever about your feet.
 I pray to be a continuous emanation of all this wondrous Love.
 Dearest Supreme Avatar of the Eternal,
 The Victory of Truth is yours.

11th July, 1972

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EAST-WEST SYNTHESIS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

"Stop thinking that you are of the West and others of the East. All human beings are of the same divine origin and meant to manifest upon earth the unity of this origin."

THESE words of the Mother provide the key-note to Sri Aurobindo's grand synthesis. In a Message to the West in August 1949, that is, barely a year and a half before he left his body, a message which, he explains, might be delivered equally to the East, he has said, "It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference."¹

This does not imply that there are or have been no elements of difference. Had it been so, the question of a synthesis would hardly arise. The problem he has set out to solve has been a fundamental problem of the past and the present; it is of immense importance to the future. And in order to solve it, he has had to take full note of the divergences, as well as to find their common ground on which to build a synthesis.

"Towards the spirit if not all the way to it man must rise or he misses his upward curve of strength; but there are different ways of approach to its secret forces. Europe, it would seem, must go through the life and the reason and find spiritual truth by their means as a crown and a revelation.... But Asia, or at any rate, India lives naturally by a spiritual influx from above, that alone brings with it a spiritual evocation of her higher powers of mind and life. The two continents are two sides of the integral orb of humanity and until they meet and fuse, each must move to whatever progress or culmination the spirit in humanity seeks, by the law of its own being, its own proper Dharma.... There is a need of divergent lines of advance until we can raise our heads into that infinity of the spirit in which there is a light broad enough to draw together and reconcile all."²

It seems that the two sides of humanity must proceed on parallel lines until, defying the rules of geometry, the two lines meet in a grand synthesis.

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Let us first dwell a little on these divergent lines of East and West in the immediate and the remoter past.

"There has been a tendency in some minds", says Sri Aurobindo in his Message, "to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East .. But the West has had...its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics."³ This is an undoubted fact of history. But the question is really one of emphasis. It is

no mere accident that all the great religions of the world had their origins in Asia. To the question: where shall we find the directing light, the regulating and harmonising principle of all our life and action, "the answer constantly given by the Asiatic mind is that we shall find it directly and immediately in religion".⁴ And the reason why the "older Asiatic nations have survived so persistently and can now, as if immortal, raise their faces towards a new dawn" is that "they have never quite lost hold of this secret, the secret of the reign of the Spirit over mind and life and body, never disowned it in impatience for a lesser victory".⁵

It will be at once objected that Asia has at least for long periods in the recent past shown an inaptitude for life and failed in the end to meet the challenges of the modern West. Sri Aurobindo refers to "her centuries of religious, philosophic and artistic reveries, her tendency towards an increasing isolation and final stagnancy of the outward life".⁶ The reason for this has to be clearly grasped before we hasten to pass an adverse judgment on the claim of spirituality and condemn the Asian endeavour as of little utility to the future.

What exactly did Asia attempt in her past dealings with life and the spirit? "Order, a secure ethical and religious framework, a settled economical system, a natural, becoming fatally a conventional and artificial hierarchy have been her ordinary methods, everywhere indeed where she reached a high development of culture. These things she founded on her religious sense and sweetened and made tolerable by a strong communal feeling, a living humanity and sympathy and certain accesses to a human equality and closeness. Her supreme effort was to discover not an external but a spiritual and inner freedom and that carried with it a great realisation of spirituality, equality and oneness. This spiritual travail was not universalised nor any endeavour made to shape the whole of human life in its image. The result was a disparateness between the highest inner individual and the outward social life."⁷

It was this failure to bridge the gulf between life and spirit that led to the stagnation and decay of Asia, her helplessness before an alien onslaught.

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In her victorious march over Asia, Europe relied on the two things that have always marked her progress, "the cult of the inquiring, defining, effective, practical reason, and the cult of life... The emphasis of the Western mind is on life, the outer life above all, the things that are grasped, visible, tangible. The inner life is taken only as an intelligent reflection of the outer world, with the reason for a firm putter of things into shape, an intelligent critic, builder, refiner of the external materials offered by Nature... The present life of the individual and the continuous physical existence and developing mind and knowledge of humanity make up her one absorbing interest."⁸

One may pause to ask a question. To what exactly has this cult of life and the practical reason led in terms of human achievement, what has been the balance sheet

of success and failure? It has, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, sought "to prepare a sufficient basis in man's physical being and vital energies and in his material environment for his full mental possibilities. By the spread of education, by the advance of the backward races, by the elevation of depressed classes, by the multiplication of labour-saving appliances, by the movement towards ideal social and economic conditions, by the labour of Science towards an improved health, longevity and sound physique in civilised humanity, the sense and drift of this vast movement translates itself in easily intelligible signs."⁹

Here too there has been a darker side, for reason relying solely on its own power "knows not how to deal with the resistance of Matter. There it is hampered and inefficient, works by bungling experiments and has either to withdraw from the struggle or submit to the grey actuality. Or else, by studying the material life and accepting the conditions of the contest, it may succeed, but only in imposing temporarily some artificial system which infinite Nature either rends and casts aside or disfigures out of recognition or by withdrawing her assent leaves as the corpse of a dead ideal."¹⁰

In the result, "it is found that civilisation has created many more problems than it can solve, has multiplied excessive needs and desires the satisfaction of which it has not sufficient vital force to sustain, has developed a jungle of claims and artificial instincts in the midst of which life loses its way and has no longer any sight of its aim. The more advanced minds begin to declare civilisation a failure and society begins to feel that they are right."¹¹

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The question is: can there be no issue out of this impasse? Is it not possible to find a common ground between East and West where the "twain shall meet"? The problem may be considered from the actual experience of the past and present and the possibilities of the future.

Throughout the course of history, East and West have been meeting in war and peace, and this has led to an attempt at cultural infiltration with considerable results. "The first attempt (on the part of the East) was the filtering of Egyptian, Chaldean and Indian wisdom through the thought of the Greek philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato and the Neo-Platonists; the result was the brilliantly intellectual and unspiritual civilisation of Greece and Rome. But it prepared the way for the second attempt when Buddhism and Vaishnavism, filtered through the Semitic temperament, entered Europe in the form of Christianity. Christianity came within an ace of spiritualising and even of asceticising the mind of Europe.... The Islamic invasion of Spain and the southern coast of the Mediterranean...may be regarded as a third attempt. The result of its meeting with Graecised Christianity was the reawakening of the European mind in feudal and Catholic Europe and the obscure beginnings of modern thought and science. The fourth and last attempt which is as yet only in its slow initial stage is the quiet entry of Eastern and chiefly of Indian thought into Europe first through the veil of German metaphysics, more latterly by its subtle influence in reawakening the

Celtic, Scandinavian and Slavonic idealism, mysticism, religionism, and the direct and open penetration of Buddhism, Theosophy, Vedantism, Bahaism and other Oriental influences in both Europe and America. On the other hand, there have been two reactions of Europe upon Asia: first the invasion of Alexander with his aggressive Hellenism which for a time held Western Asia, created echoes and reactions in India and returned through Islamic culture upon medieval Europe; secondly, the modern onslaught of commercial, political, scientific Europe upon the moral, artistic and spiritual cultures of the East."¹²

What has been the net result of all this interaction? How far are we at the present moment nearer a rapprochement if not an actual synthesis? The answer can be summed up briefly thus in Sri Aurobindo's words:

"The life of the West is still chiefly governed by the rationalistic idea and a materialistic preoccupation. But at the summits of thought and steadily penetrating more and more downward through art and poetry and music and general literature an immense change is in progress. A reaching towards deeper things, an increasing return of seekings which had been banished, an urge towards higher experience yet unrealised, an admission of ideas long foreign to the Western mentality can be seen everywhere.... Even here and there we find some growing recognition of the high value or the superior greatness of the ancient spiritual ideal."¹³

The East too has been visibly moved by the new impact of the West. In India, for example, "the first passion to imitate English ideas and culture has passed; but another more dangerous has recently taken its place, the passion to imitate Continental European culture at large and in particular the crude and vehement turn of revolutionary Russia."¹⁴

"There has been a recrudescence of the Europeanising turn in Turkey and in China reinforced by the influence of Bolshevik Russia. Wherever there is a retardatory orthodoxy to overcome, this movement is likely to appear, but only as a passing phase.

"The East is on the whole, in spite of certain questionings and scruples, willing and, where not wholly willing, forced by circumstances and the general tendency of mankind to accept the really valuable parts of modern European culture, its science, its curiosity, its ideal of universal education and uplift, its abolition of privilege, its broadening liberalising democratic tendency, its instinct of freedom and equality, its call for the breaking down of narrow and oppressive forms, for air, space, light. But at a certain point the East refuses to proceed farther and that is precisely in the things which are deepest, most essential to the future of mankind, the things of the soul, the profound things of the mind and temperament."¹⁵



All this suggest that the bridge between East and West has yet to be built on foundations that take into account their deepest tendencies and find a way to reconcile them. Where then are we to find the saving principle? In spirituality, is the answer

given by Sri Aurobindo. "The safety of Europe has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unilluminated knowledge and soul-less organisation. The safety of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental conditions in which that aim has to be worked out, otherwise she will sink deeper into the slough of despond, of a mental and physical incompetence to deal with the facts of life and the shocks of a rapidly changing movement."¹⁶

But immediately one speaks of spirituality, one thinks, as has been the custom in India for the last two thousand years or so, of a more or less complete negation or belittling of the earth life and a seeking for an escape into a supramundane state of existence to be reached only by shedding the mortal coil of life, mind and body. Or else one imagines, as has been the practice in the West, that it is some kind of "high intellectuality, idealism or an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, or a compound of all these excellent things".¹⁷ One has to be clear in one's mind as to what spirituality is in its essence before one can usefully make it the basis and aim of a vast synthesis of thought and life.

"Spirituality is in its essence," says Sri Aurobindo, "an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature."¹⁸ If we accept this as the meaning of spirituality, the question arises: how is the spiritual endeavour to remould the life and thought of East and West so that they may form an harmonious whole?

The first answer is that given by the ancient Indian culture before it was palsied and sicklied over by a too zealous insistence on the other-worldly aim. "It gave free play to the activity of the reason, to science and philosophy, to the satisfaction of the aesthetic being and to all the many arts great or small, to the health and strength of the body, to the physical and economical well-being, ease, opulence of the race...and to its general military, political and social strength and efficiency."¹⁹

This, it may be argued, is precisely what the modern West has been trying to do. Where then is the new element that spirituality will seek to introduce? "We aim at the health and vigour of the body; but with what object? For its own sake, will be the ordinary reply, because it is worth having, or else that we may have long life and a sound basis for our intellectual, vital, emotional satisfactions. Yes, for its own sake, in a way, but in this sense that the physical too is an expression of the spirit and its perfection is worth having, is part of the complete human living; but still more as a basis for all that higher activity which ends in the discovery and expression of the divine self in man.... Philosophy is in the Western way of dealing with it a dispa-

sionate enquiry by the light of the reason into the first truths of existence.... But from the spiritual viewpoint, truth of existence is to be found by intuition, inner experience and not only by the reason and by scientific observation .. Eventually, its real value is to prepare a basis for spiritual realisation and the growing of the human being into his divine nature. Science itself (in the spiritual view) becomes only a knowledge of the world which throws an added light on the Spirit of the universe and his way in things. Nor will it confine itself to a physical knowledge and its practical fruits or to the knowledge of life and man and mind based upon the idea of matter or material energy as our starting-point; a spiritualised culture will make room for new fields of research, for new and old psychical sciences and results which start from spirit as the first truth.... The primitive aim of art and poetry is to create images of man and Nature which shall satisfy the sense of beauty and embody artistically the ideas of the intelligence about life and the responses of the imagination to it; but in a spiritual culture they become too in their aim a revelation of greater things concealed in man and Nature and of the deepest spiritual and universal beauty. Politics, society, economy are in the first form of human life simply an arrangement by which men collectively can live, produce, satisfy their desires, enjoy, progress in bodily, vital and mental efficiency; but the spiritual aim makes them much more than this, first, a framework of life within which man can seek for and grow into his real self and divinity, secondly, an increasing embodiment of the divine law of being in life, thirdly, a collective advance towards the light, power, peace, unity, harmony of the diviner nature of humanity which the race is trying to evolve. This and nothing more, but nothing less, this in all its potentialities, is what we mean by a spiritual culture and the application of spirituality to life.”²⁰

It is obvious that here there is no question of East and West. The principle is the same, although in its application there are bound to be differences of detail, of emphasis, of the resultant forms. “For it is into the Divine within each man and each people that the man and the nation have to grow; it is not an external idea or rule that has to be imposed on them from without.”²¹ And the Divine is the Infinite and has room for all manner of diversities within Its unity.

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“At present,” we may conclude with Sri Aurobindo, “the first great need of the psychological life of humanity is the growth towards a greater unity ; but its need is that of a living unity, not in the externals of civilisation, in dress, manners, habits of life, details of political, social and economic order, not uniformity, which is the unity towards which the mechanical age of civilisation has been driving, but a free development everywhere with a constant friendly interchange, a close understanding, a feeling of our common humanity, its great common ideals and the truths towards which it is driving and a certain unity and correlation of effort in the united human advance.... This would best be served, not by separateness and isolation....but yet

by a certain distinctness and independence of life not subordinated to the mechanising force of an artificial unity. Even within the independent nation itself, there might be with advantage a tendency towards greater local freedom of development and variation, a sort of return to the vivid local and regional life of ancient Greece and India and medieval Italy.... A world secure of its peace and freedom might freely devote itself to the intensification of its real human powers of life by the full encouragement and flowering of the individual, local, regional, national mind and power in the firm frame of a united humanity."²²

The precise manner in which this outward framework might be created and preserved, and the thousand and one conflicts of opinion in philosophy and thought, the quarrel between science and spirituality, the mutually exclusive habits of the ordinary human mind can be resolved has been shown in ample detail in Sri Aurobindo's works. They form subjects of special study by themselves.

SANAT K. BANERJI

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REMINISCENCES OF SRI AUROBINDO

A TALK BY PROFESSOR G. MONOD-HERZEN TO THE STUDENTS OF THE SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

(Professor Gabriel Monod-Herzen of Paris is a Doctor of Science in Physics from the Sorbonne. He has behind him a rich experience not only as a Professor, a Dean and a Director of several Science Institutes in various universities ranging from Paris to Kabul, Hanoi and Saigon, but also as a member of the "Free French" movement during the last World War and later as the French Consul in Ethiopia. His connection with the Ashram in Pondicherry goes back to 1935-36, and since then he has remained an admirer and follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.)

Dear Friends,

Amita told me the other day that since I had had the good fortune to see Sri Aurobindo and since this is the Centenary Year of his birth I could try to relate something of that encounter. Then I thought of applying "Free Progress" to the occasion: that is, I asked several among you to tell me what you would like me to speak about. In this way I collected six different questions which will be the basis of my talk; it is not I therefore who have chosen the topics.

To begin with, how did I meet Sri Aurobindo?

There are several ways to meet a person; it can be as I am meeting you now, personally; or else one can meet a person through his works. Well, it so happened that I met Sri Aurobindo without realising how.

One day in Paris a very good lady-friend who was interested in India and who had been there and, knowing I was also interested, spoke to me of a young Indian who had just arrived in Paris to study science: would I like to introduce him to people and allow him to work with me at the University? Naturally I said "Yes". He was a charming young man born not far from Madras, whose name was Ramaya Naidu. We both gave our Physics examinations at the Sorbonne at the same time. He was actually from Pondicherry. He invited me to his house and there introduced me to a big, magnificent man named Paul Richard whose wife, I was told, had remained in Pondicherry and would stay there for the rest of her life. Though I was greatly surprised I did not doubt for a second that this was the Mother. Some time later the lady who had introduced Ramaya to me said, "You know that a journal was brought out in Pondicherry in French called the *Arya*." Then she lent me all the numbers she had. I was fired with this literature, and not long ago I found the Notes I had made while reading *The Secret of the Veda*. I never doubted what Sri Aurobindo was to be for me

later. I had completely forgotten that reading, which was my first contact with him.

Many, many years passed. When I came to Pondicherry during the period that I was Professor in Afghanistan it was in order to spend my vacation with my mother who lived here since she could not bear the altitude of Kabul because of her health. The first time I came down, a lady whom many of you know, Suvrata (Madame Yvonne Robert Gaebelé) said to us, "You know, there are two absolutely extraordinary people in our town, and I must introduce you to them." She took us to the Darshan of November 24, 1935. That was the first time I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I see on this paper that the questioner would like to know what my first impression was. It is very difficult to say in a definitive manner what it was. When I saw Sri Aurobindo seated next to the Mother I had a feeling of certitude, of stability — an impression I had received often before on seeing a huge mountain At the first glance I had the surety that what I had so long searched for, the solution of my problems, was there. I did not know why, there was no logic in it; but it was an absolute certitude which has never since changed. At that time I did not know any of his works; I began studying them from that period on: that is, 1935-36.

One used to see the Mother pretty frequently then. I was very friendly with Pavitra¹ and in order to see him without bothering anyone I used to go and have breakfast with him in the room he occupied above the Atelier. Later it became a big office. I had the opportunity of seeing the Mother there, who often needed to see Pavitra. She had the look of a kind, gentle, affectionate grandmother. She would come in her dressing gown, with her grey hair pulled back: it was extraordinarily comforting because one felt to what extent she was human, direct, and one could tell her anything, ask her anything. Naturally one avoided questioning her at that moment, but in other interviews I was able to ask for explanations on Sri Aurobindo's works that I was then getting acquainted with.

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I have also been asked what side of Sri Aurobindo's work appealed to me most. There are two attitudes in him which I most admire: the first is that he does not reject anything or anyone. There is a place for all opinions, even those which he does not accept, in his work. He has come to find that particle of truth that exists in everything because without it that opinion itself could not exist. One never feels a prisoner of ideas when one reads him. One never says, "This is a falsehood," or else "That person is wrong"; one says, "Here is an incomplete idea." Being a physicist, I was deeply struck because I had always been greatly impressed by the fact that the long succession of scientists did not contradict one another, as say those who have not studied science themselves. In fact they complement one another. Take, for example, the ancient Greek thinkers, or those of the Middle Ages, who had very different ideas from ours. Granting what they knew, one cannot say they were mistaken. They had a

¹ J. Bastrer St.—Hilaire

certain form of thought which, in relation to us and our present knowledge, is incomplete. Sri Aurobindo has maintained this attitude throughout his writings; this gives us the possibility to appreciate all forms of thought, even those apparently in opposition to ours. As a man of science, this is what originally impressed me and taught me so much. I said to myself, "Finally I have found someone who does not demand that I reject certain things in order to carry me towards others, someone who leaves me absolutely free to choose. Naturally, he also leaves me with the responsibility of choice."

This was the second question. The third was: Sri Aurobindo's cheerful disposition. When I learned from various disciples that he was humourous and used to smile and laugh readily, I said to myself, "Here is someone in whom I can have confidence, because a philosophy that makes one sad cannot be a wise one."

I had the good fortune of meeting four or five persons who had really practised Yoga throughout their lives, who had totally consecrated themselves to it. They were all happy, good-humoured. I knew Sri Ramana Maharishi at Tirruvanamalai. He used to smile readily in spite of his bad health and pain. I knew Sri Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon): he was very cheerful and had maintained his British humour intact. I knew his Guru, Srimati Chakravarti: she was equally cheerful. An anecdote confirmed for me Sri Aurobindo's humour. I was acquainted with the Chief of the French Police here, and I asked him to search through his files to see if he could find something concerning the Ashram in its early days. He came back later very intrigued and said to me, "Just imagine what I have discovered! I can't give you the files but I can tell you that I found a police report which began by saying, 'I, secret agent' — this way everybody knew it, didn't they? — 'being stationed at the corner of rue de la Marine near a room where Sri Aurobindo and his friends had gathered, heard him laugh loudly: which goes to prove that these people are not very serious.'"

Hearing this, I said to myself, "This time I have found the right thing!" Sri Aurobindo was always like that. Purani once told me that a disciple had been very much preoccupied with the idea that in the future we would become Supermen. Not us, perhaps, but later on there would be a humanity higher than the present one on all levels. And so this disciple wanted to know if, given the proper conditions of reincarnation, he would become a Superman or a Superwoman. And he asked how his physical appearance would be. And naturally he wanted to know if he would be handsome. His anxiety was so great that he thought of speaking to Sri Aurobindo about it and asking him what he would look like. Sri Aurobindo very seriously told him: "Have you thought of one thing? You know that the Superman will be able to capture the energies of Nature in order to maintain his vitality. Therefore he need not eat. If he does not need to eat, he will not need teeth. Do you think that will be very pretty?"

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The next question is: "What has been in my opinion, Sri Aurobindo's special

contribution to our knowledge, which distinguishes him from other teachers?" I had often asked myself the same question, because I had a passion for his works.

I wanted to write a book in French on Sri Aurobindo, and I had many opportunities because Sri Aurobindo was still here at that time. He agreed with my project and each time I wrote a chapter I would give it to Nirod, who would then read it to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo would send it back with his comments. I am going to make a confession because we are talking here freely. Whenever there was a question which baffled me, I would imagine a solution and write it down, as if I was certain about it; and very often Sri Aurobindo would send me word: "No, it's not like that. These are the facts." And so I had the guidance I wanted, because if I had asked him directly, I knew that very probably he would have sent a message as follows: "It's unimportant." He knew quite well that this was a little game on my part and he accepted it, because he was not able to let any errors go by, even those of little importance. And he did this with absolute precision, and I give you the following two examples.

Generally one makes the distinction between the literary mind and the scientific. Sri Aurobindo is the perfect proof of the artificial and inexact character of that distinction. Here is a purely literary man, with the knowledge of ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and four modern European languages, who certainly respected science but never practised it; yet he had the scientific spirit. Here is the first example.

During the war Sri Aurobindo would have the English communique read out to him every day. I know this because when I would go for breakfast with Pavitra it was the time for military news. The receiving room was at Pavitra's, who was then in charge of conveying the news to Sri Aurobindo. One day Purani went to Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon and, referring to military matters, said, "It's terrible to think that yesterday again the German submarines sank 65,000 tons of Allied shipping." Sri Aurobindo said, "No, 67,500." He did not want any approximations.

Now for my second example. While I was writing my book I related how Sri Aurobindo began publishing the *Karmayogin* at Calcutta again after coming out of prison; and how in the newspaper once, he suddenly (as I wrote) "received the order to go to Chandernagore," The next morning I was sent a little piece of paper where the word "recut" which I had used was crossed out by Sri Aurobindo and in its place "perçut" was written. Well, one really has to know French in order to make a correction like that. Sri Aurobindo had a literary mind but of a perfect precision. It is a good point to keep in view: when you read him, say to yourselves that each word has been chosen and no other can be put in its place.

Here then is a primary original characteristic of Sri Aurobindo's teaching: his openness to all opinions, his capacity to understand them and then to inject a new element.

I believe it was the corrections he made in my book that showed me just how rare it is to meet a teacher who is so completely attached to the Truth as to be able to see it everywhere, even under a mass of errors. And this not only in dealing with current theory but also in contemplating the unfolding of time.

Sri Aurobindo never depreciated the past in order to give value to the future—which is the goal of his action. On the contrary, he has sought as far as possible the eternal truth. For India he rediscovered it in the secret of the Veda, followed its evolution through the Upanishads up to the epics, then in the spiritual expansion that ensued, guided mostly by the Gita, until the appearance and magnificent development of the cult of the Divine Mother which characterises our era and gives the key to the future, a future entirely different from the past.

This is another profoundly original aspect of Sri Aurobindo: to show the new and at the same time inevitable character, according to the Divine Will, of the transformation he announces and to indicate that everything which had preceded it was in effect a preparation.

I wish to emphasise this point: that which Sri Aurobindo announces and describes is not a theory which pleases him or which is to him personal; it is a truth he has experienced. One cannot help remarking once again that this is precisely the scientific attitude, and Sri Aurobindo knew this, since he himself said that his room was his laboratory. There he tried everything, verified it before offering it to us. I think you all understand how his teaching was, and still is today, the inspiration behind my work as a physicist.

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We have here another question: his relationship with his disciples. I was not able to observe this directly since I did not have the good fortune to see Sri Aurobindo except at Darshan. But I had an indirect relationship with him through my books. And I have already given you an example of the care with which he attended to it. When it was finished, Nirod came to announce that Sri Aurobindo had asked him to tell me, "It can be published. No important errors remain."

Another thing that I was able to confirm with him—and I have seen the same in the Mother—is that neither he nor the Mother is indulgent. They understand all the failings of the disciples but are not weak in dealing with them, not at all! When there is a mistake, they see it and speak of it. But they speak of it with a smile, and when it is not a serious matter they add, "If you insist, try, you will see, you will have the experience." This always inspired absolute faith in the sense that I had the impression of seeing someone who possessed the Truth but who, at the same time, was closer to me than my own self, and to whom consequently I could say everything, someone who could understand all. I could even hope to understand what was being said to me, because it was said in such a familiar way: no big words, nothing extraordinary, no difficult vocabulary. Take the Mother's *Conversations*. With what precision of language and thought she manages to deal with the highest subjects without ever using complicated words! It is truly an example. The reader has the feeling of finding everything very simple, even that which he has not understood at all.

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Before arriving at any conclusions I must speak to you about a final, rather delicate question—without answering it—because it has been posed to Sri Aurobindo himself on a number of occasions and he has not answered. It is: “Why has Sri Aurobindo not spoken of his own Sadhana, since everybody would like some information on the subject?” I once asked Pavitra the reason for this reticence. Pavitra answered, “The reason is extremely simple. Sri Aurobindo used to say, ‘I don’t eat this, or I don’t eat that; I use this type of soap or that toothbrush, I meditate at such and such an hour. Everybody will do the same thing.’ And that is precisely what Sri Aurobindo does not want, because it is not by copying him that we can become him. It is up to the disciple to choose not only his hours for meditation but even the smallest necessities of life. It is up to him to acquire the proper attitude which will permit him to utilise his daily routine for spiritual progress.”

It is said that ready-made clothes never fit as well as those made to order. Well, it is the same thing regarding spiritual life but with much vaster consequences. If one imitates someone even though it be his Master, one is not what he could be and what he should be in all sincerity. Sri Aurobindo wanted to allow each of his disciples to discover the truth of himself. One can verify this in his letters. What is extraordinary is their varied forms. One feels therein the respect he had for that which was unique in each disciple. He used to answer apparently insignificant questions, without forgetting to add a little remark, brief but just necessary, and this without ever stressing errors.

There is only one really important case where he spoke of himself, in a very revealing manner. A disciple wrote to him, saying that what Sri Aurobindo had done was marvellous, admirable, but that surely he had come to this life with a past that was helping him, that he was, as one commonly says, well-equipped. To the disciple the proof was that when Sri Aurobindo wanted mental silence he obtained it and, what is unique, in three days he had been able to reach the state of Nirvana. Sri Aurobindo answered:

“... You write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work”

This statement—from a letter of December, 1933 (Second Series, p.72)—seems extremely important to me, because it affirms at once Sri Aurobindo’s understanding of our difficulties and the possibility to overcome them, of which he was a living example.

At the time that I saw this letter *The Life Divine* had just appeared in two volumes. My mother and I had read them with passionate interest, such passion that meeting the Mother one morning at Pavitra’s I said to her, “Mother, this is the fourth time I am reading the first volume....” To which she answered, “That’s very good, but it would be good if you read the second also”

That's what I did. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. The impression I had, reading *The Life Divine*, was not at all that of receiving what is ordinarily called a lesson in philosophy, but that of listening to a traveller who had discovered a new land. He climbed a hill first, then a mountain and he described the panorama, first in one direction: in spirit he made me see its different aspects, from night to morning, under the stars, in daytime, with sun and clouds, I saw the seasons following each other.... Then he turned in another direction to reveal another aspect; finally, I thought I knew this new land, knew how I would be able to live there.

And naturally the strong impression made me desire and then will to go to that country myself, made me desire to leave, to walk towards him.... And it is perhaps for this reason that I am here today with you.

But don't imagine that I was very far! My position—and I feel that there are many in the same situation—is a bit like a traveller who leaves for the United States (for example), having read very well a guide-book of the country. He disembarks and begins the stretch from New York to Washington. He notes the perfect concordance between what he sees and what the guide-book has taught him and he concludes that the book probably speaks the truth about the rest of the country. But this remaining portion is immense. I therefore took Sri Aurobindo's book as a guide and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as teachers. I forced myself to apply what I was learning to my daily work, that of a physicist in his laboratory, of a professor before hundreds of students: I always found precise and true indications.

Particularly in my laboratory where I had the opportunity for many years to advise researchers who were preparing their theses. Naturally they knew nothing of Sri Aurobindo and I did not speak to them of him; also I had to continually make an adaptation of his thought which was a marvellous job for me since I confirmed each day how the new vision of the world that Sri Aurobindo gives us was rich and true in its practical application.

This is applicable to students and professors of all ages. You know that in the case that interests us at present this application is "Free Progress". Thanks to you, I begin to know its beauty and difficulty, and above all to become that which is lacking, so as to conform better to the original inspiration. But I must tell you that after having spoken in France with young people and with those not so young, I found, especially among the former, a good majority who understand that that is the direction necessary in order to come close to the realisation of an ideal which is the essence of our lives.

I would like you to find in this testimony a further reason to make the Birth Centenary year, according to the wishes of the Mother, for all *a very good year*.

GABRIEL MONOD-HERZEN

(Translated by Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet from the French)

SRI AUROBINDO IN POLITICS

(This is the translation of an extract from a Marathi book, Atma-Vritta (My Life-Story) by Dr. V. V. Athalye, published in 1958. The extract is from page 136. Its translation is by a reader of Mother India, J.S. Kuppuswamy, who picked it out as an illuminating document on the character and attitude of Sri Aurobindo as a politician when he had led the Extremist or Nationalist Party.)

IN 1910, January, the Hughly District Political Conference was held near Calcutta. Some of our medical students went to the Conference. The delegates to the Conference were divided into two groups: Moderates and Extremists. The Extremist group was lodged in a bungalow called Dutch Villa. Naturally, we too stayed there. The leader of the Extremists was Aurobindo Ghose. He was given an independent room. The others occupied the open spaces in the bungalow. One incident of this occasion stands out for its great sublimity, and is worth remembering. Before the start of the Conference Aurobindo was seated in his room. He was surrounded by his colleagues, and Dr. Paranjpe, though a worker from Vidharbha and not from Bengal, went in because of his acquaintance and got for himself a seat next to Aurobindo.

We students stood outside the room and listened to the discussion going on inside. Aurobindo's colleagues were making forceful speeches, exhorting him to trounce the Moderates in that Conference, by any and every means. Aurobindo would not agree to this improper method. Seeing that he was not coming round, Paranjpe broke in: "Aurobindo Babu, you don't know politics. You must bring down the Moderates by any means fair or foul, by hook or crook." The Maharashtrian workers in the field of politics have an over-high opinion of their own political sagacity!

"What are these Bengalis after all? Just simpletons who hold the Marathas in dread: such is their past." This, in effect, was the tone of Paranjpe's remark to Aurobindo.

Aurobindo was very calm. After everybody had spoken, he said, "No, I shall never agree to that. Do you have any idea what great work Surendranath Banerji and his Moderate Party have done in Bengal politics? We are standing on their shoulders and because of that we appear tall. Besides this, whatever be anybody's work, I shall not be a party to bringing about their downfall by foul means. We shall fully respect the Moderate Party and place before the Conference, in clear terms, our stand of Independence. If our ideal is sacred and lofty and just, the Conference cannot but give its verdict in our favour. If you do not accept this policy I shall withdraw from this Conference."

The sublimity of Aurobindo's advice was so effective that his colleagues and Paranjpe shut up as if they had been slapped in the face. The Conference was conducted in accord with Aurobindo's policy and the votaries of Independence had a victory over the Moderates by straightforward methods.

Aurobindo's noble yet powerful stand made a great impression on me. In my later life, on many such occasions, this teaching has kept me watchful.

THE ETERNAL WORD

MAN's possibilities are unlimited, as unlimited as is the universe, but to comprehend this it is necessary to go beyond fragmentary concepts of time and space and to recognise the harmonious interplay between vast and small, near and distant, which are only considered such because of the limits of our own perception. Handed down through the ages is a design in which man is given the possibility to find his place in the cosmic vastness; therein he can reach an understanding of what his function is in the universe, and what his spiritual destiny consists of. Not only can he view in this pattern his own spiritual fate, but this design—the Zodiac, with all its relations of planetary interplay and energy flows—gives humanity the history of the whole evolutionary pattern, based on the unfolding in time and space of an eternal perfection; or better said, an ever perfecting consciousness is at work and this celestial harmony reveals the path humanity will follow in order that this universe be not only the inner spiritual image of God, but that ultimately all of Manifestation become the vivid, throbbing and pulsating divinity incarnate.

To assist man in his spiritual evolution, both individual and collective, specific beings incarnate who facilitate this task and announce the next step in the spiritual ladder, as well as display its process of attainment within their own being. Man does not truly know his role in the Play; in a word, he is not aware of his divinity. He cannot see that there is a willful taking on of the veils of obscurity so that the Supreme can realise the fullness of His being. Throughout his existence he lives in darkness, but it remains a darkness only until he realises, through an opening in consciousness, his essential divinity. If he does not achieve this during a lifetime he must return again and again to fulfil this task until he understands that the "fall" is his contribution to the divine play. He is the sacrifice, so to speak, that the Lord may know and enjoy himself.

An Avatar understands this play; he is conscious of his divinity even before he outwardly proclaims it. He lives in the knowledge that he has been born into darkness and that though he is aware of his divine essence he must consciously accept the fetters of darkness, and moreover he must use them and through them manifest the Lord and carry souls in ignorance on to the fulfilment of their rightful destiny, in spite of themselves.

Both the Avatar and the unrealised individual meet on the playground of God, but while the one ignorantly carries out the game according to the established rules, the former plays with the knowledge that he is the player one with the play, the enjoyer and that which is enjoyed, the movement as well as that from which all movement

arises. The Avatar says: I know that I am, but I also know that I must fulfil. He walks through life untouched by its vicissitudes, seeing in all Manifestation the hidden light of the Supreme, untouched in his inner being by the sufferings or the glories he has consciously accepted. His compassionate eyes fall upon the sins of mankind and see in them only the longing of the soul in darkness to become conscious once again of its origin and oneness with the Lord, and the greater the sin or the more distant the individual appears to be from this consciousness, the easier it is for him to see the divine flame that illumines even the most obscure of forms, for through form the Lord displays his most varied wonders. The Avatar is such because only he can view as God what mortals shy away from, only he sees the unity throughout.

In creation we are given the joy of witnessing God's play with his mate, and as a part of manifestation we are God's lover and in us he expresses and experiences all the rapture that is His. Mortals delight in love with their kind; the Avatar sees in *all* creation, of which he is an intrinsic part, the thrust of the Lord into the profundities of His beloved. In all moments he is conscious of his body being a vessel into which God pours His love in all its aspects, and from which He demands the most ecstatic rapture. He comes to teach men the artful ways of love most pleasing to the Divine Lover, for creation is the paramour of God.

Such is Sri Aurobindo, and his message and realisation are not limited only to today but their purpose and fulfilment extend into the future for at least a period of 2,000 years. But, in effect, it cannot even be limited to that, for if one sees his place in this evolutionary design, he fits into the eternal whole and his message is timeless. He is the Incarnation or Avatar of the Age of Aquarius, the point that humanity is actually traversing in its spiritual unfoldment.

Because of the precession of the equinoxes there is the motion of the Earth backward through the signs, remaining approximately 2,160 years in each; to complete the whole cycle some 26,000 years transpire. Thus, leaving the sign Pisces we have now entered Aquarius, and so the term Aquarian Age is used to identify the present era. But to understand fully the mission of Sri Aurobindo it is necessary to step back in time and to study the meaning of the Piscean Age, as well as the era to follow Aquarius, that of Capricorn, or the Golden Age—to which he himself has so often referred. It must be understood that three signs are to be taken simultaneously when delving into this ancient mystery. That is, the Zodiac of 12 signs is broken up into four quarters and each quarter is a unit within the total, each containing three different energy flows: Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable, or that of Creation, Preservation and Destruction or dissolution. While the individual progresses in this order, the evolution of humanity as a whole proceeds—as stated previously—in apparent retrocession; thus the movement is from Dissolution to Preservation to Creation. The Piscean was of the order of Dissolution or Destruction, the Aquarian that of Preservation and the Golden Age is that of Creation, the culmination of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo—the sign which signifies the *Shakti* manifest in Creation. In this spi-

ritual journey we are embarking on, let us therefore go back in time and view the Piscean Age and its significance, as well as its connection to the present era.

Christ was the herald of that period. His birth marked the beginning of the Age and, as can be noted by all, the most important symbols in Christianity coincide to point to his coming as the Incarnation whose mission it was to directly pave the way for those who were to carry out the supreme work. Thus we have the symbol of the fishes predominant in the Christian faith, as well as the fact that most of the disciples were "fishermen". But the era of Christ corresponded to the energy flow of destruction or dissolution and therefore his mission was in a sense doomed from the outset, if viewed in a limited fashion. That is, he was aware of the seeds he was planting in humanity which would carry it to perhaps the darkest age known to us yet in the history of the spirit, for Christianity as it has taken shape appears to be a precise contradiction to the words of the saviour. Yet when viewed in the light of this evolutionary design, it was only by plunging into such darkness that mankind can now enjoy its liberation and the subsequent journey into light, culminating in the Golden Age.

Christianity has influenced the whole of civilisation for the last 2,000 years. It is the underlying breath in the entire movement towards materiality in which the world is now immersed. This is in accord with the times and Christ may have been aware of his apparently negative mission. This is perhaps the meaning of his sacrifice on the cross and the eclipse at the time of his death, a darkening of the light. These are intrinsic characteristics of Pisces. The basis of the sign lies in the element of self-sacrifice, and its fulfilment is through Divine Love. Therefore we have these two elements foremost in the Christian faith. The exaltation of martyrdom, for one, and the constant stress on suffering, self-abnegation and self-sacrifice are major characteristics of Christian mysticism. These form a part of the darkness we have spoken of, but Christ also planted the seed of Divine Love in evolving humanity, to spread on a vast, universal scale, and for this reason his birth was not possible in India or any far Eastern country. It was necessary that he show the flowering Western civilisation what in the Orient has been a long accepted fact: divinity does incarnate and the Supreme sends his "son" to the Earth "made flesh". This seed was necessary so that the movement of *universal transformation* (the Aquarian Age) could then take place, because it is in accord with the times that the whole of humanity be brought to its rightful destiny of a life divine.

The birthday of Christ is placed in the sign Capricorn; whether this be factually true or not is of little importance. It is important in the symbolic sense and what this symbol would indicate to future humanity as a clue to the ultimate goal, that what was initiated in the Piscean Age would culminate in that of Capricorn. His birth coincides with the Roman Saturnalia, a feast which reconstructed for a number of days the glories of the past "golden age of Saturn", when during the god's reign (the Capricorn Age) all was peace, happiness, contentment and fulfilment. The feast was held at the winter solstice when the Sun enters the sign Capricorn and thus signified

a return of the light for Western civilisation. This is, however, only symbolic of a greater movement: the sign represents Cosmic Midday.

The symbol of Capricorn is the Goat with the tail of a Fish. In this pictograph is given the indication—together with other factors such as planetary relationships and energy flows—of two movements, the plunge into the abyss and the rise to the heights, experienced simultaneously. The Goat on the top of the mountain but who carries within himself the tail of the Fish from the depths of the sea. The mountain and the sea are two feminine symbols, (the sign itself is feminine). In astrology one refers to the soul (water) and the other to matter (earth). Capricorn is the highest point of the Zodiac, the zenith, where the rays of the Sun (symbol of the divine) are brightest and visible throughout creation. As stated, it is Cosmic Midday and when mankind reaches this point in evolution, 2,000 years hence, divinity will be openly manifest. The symbolic Saturnalia will last not a matter of days but will extend into centuries and centuries. The sign is that of the Universal Mother and the Conquest of Matter, that is, matter no longer subjected to the decaying hand of Time (Saturn-Cronus); the Power of God visible in all aspects of creation, the divine race that Sri Aurobindo announces and to the fulfilment of which he dedicated his whole life. The key to the sign and its realisation is that the two extremes must meet and a simultaneous experience of the divinity in *all*, even what appears to be farthest from the divine breath, must take place. The only possible manner in which this becomes a reality is through Love—a total and complete plunge into the abyss with the sure, self-abandon of a lover, thereby experiencing in the abyss the heights of ecstatic Bliss. The saviour *is* Love and this was the message of the Piscean Age, that on this breath humanity would be able to realise the tremendous height and depth and width that await. In the soul is to be found this divinity and the mountain and the sea shall be One.

If Pisces is Divine Love, Capricorn is the Power of Divine Love for the sign signifies a formidable ascent of the vital force (Mars in exaltation in the sign) meeting the descent from above, prepared in the sign which precedes it, Aquarius. This descent is the Golden Waters that the Water Carrier—the sign's pictograph—pours onto creation. It is the Supramental Descent that Sri Aurobindo both realised and announced. In order that the descent fulfil itself as determined, a whole period of transformation is needed, the vessels into which these waters of divine life flow are to be made capable of containing the force. Matter must be made to consciously open itself to this descent and its rigidity be broken down through an awakening of the consciousness contained in the very cells. Therefore the most minute particle in creation must join the greatest, in a marriage immortal and signifying victory over the disintegrating and ignorant forces of death. Man is given this period of 2,000 years to form the new race and Sri Aurobindo has come to hasten the march and assure that within this period the great transformation will have taken place.

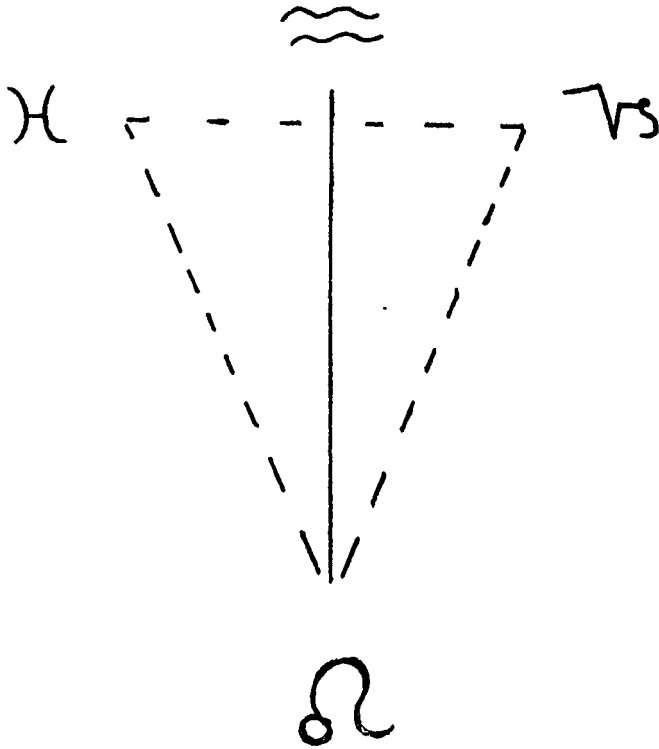
The more resistances placed in the way of this transforming power the greater the destruction that awaits humanity in all aspects of life, for the transformation must

occur and the thrust of the Lord is urgent. Transformation implies willingness in the object in question to receive the force, but if only resistance and rigidity are met the power works with the fury of a tornado and sweeps away everything in its path in a movement of destruction. The next thirty years are crucial for during this period humanity will face the crossroads of transformation or destruction. The divine race *will be*, there is nothing that can stop this because it is in the very essence of all that is, but whether it will be carried out in darkness or in the full light of the Lord is the question that looms on the horizon and because of which spiritual leaders throughout the world are urgent to awaken the consciousness of man.

Here the question is not to compare Christ with Sri Aurobindo in the matter of their realisation, or to find an individual similarity between the two, which in fact is not the case. The purpose is to bring forth the role that certain beings play in the spiritual evolution of the whole of humanity. The centuries have been filled with mystics, saints, realised beings of every religion, school, cult, system or no-system. But these individuals did not take upon themselves the work of carrying humanity on to a further level, a higher collective consciousness, a closer collective union with the Supreme. Theirs was, in a sense, limited to the more immediate and personal. Here we are considering only the Incarnations corresponding to the respective Ages and how they fit into the entire pattern. A very significant point is precisely the fact that one is of the Middle East and through a centre in Europe influenced the entire West. The universal movement could not have taken place had it been restricted to the East; and the newest element had to be born in India and thus gather back the threads of East and West at this ripe moment. India's function in the pattern is most significant—as was Rome's for the Piscean Age. The fact of her independence being August 15th, Sri Aurobindo's birthday, is enough to verify the role this centre is to play in the Age. (The nation itself as a spiritual consciousness is under the rule of Capricorn.)

Yet the movement is universal and the true role can only be fulfilled when all barriers of nationalities and religious divisions are completely dissolved. This is the Aquarian demand. A centre of forces, a sort of accumulator is needed and has been established by Sri Aurobindo. From there the spiritual movement of humanity receives its guiding light. But this guiding light cannot illumine unless there be no barriers or obstacles in the consciousness of those who are in the centre, to thus mar the purity of the force that is descending. Astrology is wide, high and deep; it looks universally and never in fragments; it points to the whole always, and brings all fragments to the essential unity. The Art is under the rule of Aquarius and it is for this reason that its true message will be revealed during this Age.

The fulfilment of the Golden Age lies in Power, the *Shakti*, the feminine principle that displays and carries out in manifestation the central breath or seed of the unchanging Divine. The two aspects of the Divine openly join in the transformation and as such Sri Aurobindo worked to establish the Power of God in a physical Incarnation or, better said, to unveil this incarnated Power. This he carried out with the Mother, and in the following diagram we can see the joint role they play :

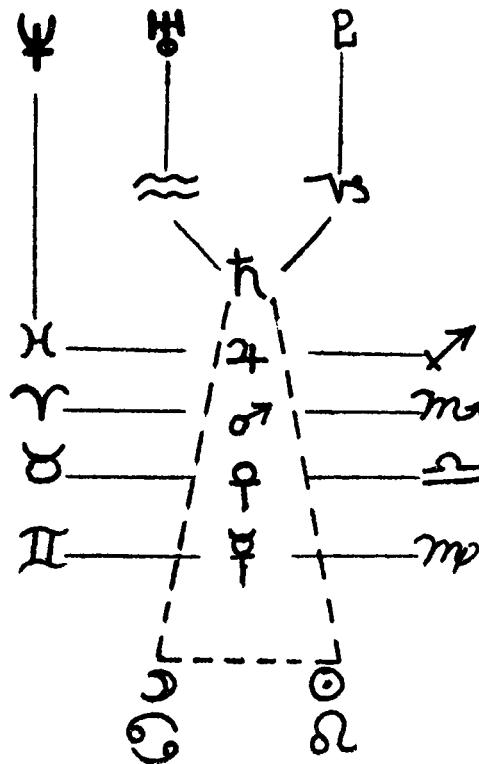


Leo, Sri Aurobindo's birth sign, lies in direct opposition to Aquarius; the Mother's sign, Pisces, is found to the left of Aquarius and that of Capricorn to the right. Leo signifies the Masculine Principle, the Purusha, he who upholds the play of Prakriti. From this diagram it can be seen how this Incarnation forms the roots for the tree consisting of Pisces, Aquarius and Capricorn. In these three signs, with Leo at its base, all the elements are included, Fire, Earth, Air and Water, as well as the three energy flows : Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable. The element Air of Aquarius, that of the Universal Transformation, is cupped in between the trinity of Pisces, Leo and Capricorn. Christ brought the concept of the trinity to the West, and this age will see the triune aspect of God incarnate : feminine, masculine and offspring of the two. The Mother is the present link of the Piscean Age and in Capricorn is the link with the future.

That the Mother is of Pisces is very significant, of course. The sign has the intrinsic characteristic of self-sacrifice. All her life has reflected such; during her youth and adult life she completely dedicated herself to others and relinquished all personal peace in realisation. She put herself into Sri Aurobindo's hands with the total self-abandon of the sign, a total surrender. From this point all else came in second place and it was always a life dedicated to work and the effacement of self in favour of others. That

occultism occupied a vital place in her life is also of the sign Pisces. Now the element of sacrifice is seen by the subjection of her body to the work of physical yoga and its subsequent illnesses. The cross the Mother bears is the burden of the physical in its present state, and her sacrifice is the acceptance to remain in that body for the benefit of mankind.

Sri Aurobindo incarnates the force sustaining the play of the opposite three. He works into Pisces (the Mother), Aquarius (the universal transformation and the intermediate race) and Capricorn, the third element. His life clearly manifests this in practical details. In all ways he worked from behind,—his retirement was an absolute necessity if the whole design was to attain the perfection of its essence. Leo seminate and retires while his seed is made to flower. The lion remains in his den while the lioness goes forth to hunt. There are very many proofs of the union of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the benefit of collective spiritual evolution to be found in the individual horoscopes; this is not, however, the purpose of the present work but it must here be stated that only by having this information, because of the importance given in the Aurobindonian Yoga to precise dates and the maintenance of exact records, that insight into the greater plan was made possible.



The Zodiac represents a progression within the eternal, without beginning or end; following the movement through we locate our position in the spiral of creation. But in order to determine what changes have occurred as to our last passage through the wheel, a period of 26,000 years, we are given the super-imposition of the newest planets. They fit into the design in the harmonious manner characteristic of all elements of astrology. This diagram is highly significant for it places the root of the wheel of creation in the solar-lunar principles, the masculine and feminine, the Purusha and Prakriti. Also, the planets in the middle are the rulers of the signs indicated and are placed exactly according to their physical position in the solar system; what has a meaning in consciousness has also its physical counterpart. From the solar-lunar root the system expands upward until it culminates in the two signs opposite these roots: Capricorn and Aquarius. These two principles find their highest fulfilment when the Earth progresses through these signs, as is presently taking place. In the ancient arrangement of things they are ruled by Saturn, the planet that signifies, among other things, crystallisation. It weds the Moon and Sun and in its domain brings about the necessary conditions for the unity of both. The descent of the currents from above (Aquarius—masculine domain of Saturn) are crystallised in matter (Capricorn—feminine domain of Saturn). The masculine domain of Saturn is equivalent to its opposite sign, Leo, a sort of Purusha. Therefore, though this Age and the Golden Age are both of the reign of Saturn, it will not be visible in Manifestation until the counterpart of Cancer (Prakriti) is reached in Capricorn. Nevertheless the actual reign is also Saturn's and a preview may very well be had and experienced by some of what will universally take place in the future.

We have passed through these signs many times in the spiral of creation, each time a cycle is complete. Then the movement recommences but always on another level, an ascension toward the fullest light of the eternal, each passage through the sign differing from the last. We are given the key to this difference by the super-imposition of new planets in the design, and thus we have Neptune, Uranus and Pluto that co-rule respectively Pisces, Aquarius and Capricorn, the trinity that interests us at present.

For our Age the revolutionary force of Uranus announces the work of the descent from above that Sri Aurobindo teaches, and indicates the extraordinary power of transformation. All existing systems and dogmas and life patterns will be broken up, the foundations of all aspects of life shaken and only those that have their basis in a direct contact with Truth, or Truth-Consciousness, as Sri Aurobindo terms it, will be able to stand the cyclonic renovating force that humanity is now being exposed to. The movement is universal, and so are Sri Aurobindo's teachings. His scope is vast and timeless, and the mission entrusted to him will work itself into evidence the farther mankind progresses into the Age, and the truth of his work will be apparent on a universal basis for all to see, even the most alien to the Light. And at that time the movement of darkness will no longer be viewed as an opposite of light but will be seen to have been the necessary shroud to protect what was gestating, until the

time was ripe for it to take birth. The dark, the feminine principle, is the womb holding the spirit-soul within. When the Golden Age dawns both movements will be seen as One. And it is this that can translate itself on the individual scale and signify the new birth process, no longer based on a disintegration of the vital force, but rather a controlled and directed accumulation of energy. Birth will no longer spring from chaos but will be a wilful reception of the divine breath.

In the individual progression this last quarter of the Zodiac signifies the unity of man. When this point is reached in the evolution of a soul the individual passes into a realm of integral realisation. This is Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, it is the yoga of the Aquarian Age, the Age of Unity. It is written in this ancient pattern and will fulfil itself in time, for his coming was established by the Supreme for the purpose of carrying his creation to the glorious destiny of a divine life on Earth. The greatness of his message lies precisely in the fact that it goes beyond the barriers of our limited temporal vision and embraces not only an Age but a quarter in an entire arc of spiritual history. His incarnation unites the threads of the three signs through which humanity now passes. It is, however, beyond even these limits, for it is one with the essence of all that was, is and will be. It is the word of the eternal and finds its fulfilment in the Power of Divine Love.

PATRIZIA NORELLI-BACHELET

RIDE...

RIDE, stallions of music, ride away
 and may you find
 the chevalier noble
 to match
 your splendid force
 with skill
 and break
 into flowing stride
 over the spheres,
 you together
 one becoming,
 possessor with possessed.

GEORGETTE

A LOOK BEHIND

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY ASHRAM DAYS

WHEN I reached Pondicherry, the Ashram was already two and a half years old, and a new disciplined life had come into being under the Mother's direct control and guidance. I heard about it before coming, from friends who had been temporary visitors at the Ashram, and also from a few old associates of Sri Aurobindo who could not adjust themselves to the new conditions in the Ashram. They found it too difficult to change their old ways all at once and turn a new leaf by surrendering themselves to the Mother in a strictly disciplined external life. It would have proved easy enough for them if it had been an accustomed formal surrender, leaving the old ego-self as it was. But to surrender each and every movement of the mind and life, especially of the vital being in its daily activity, was not only very difficult but was felt as suppression of their free development. So these few returned one by one, some confessing their weakness, some critical of the new order. However, when I sought the Mother's permission to come and join the Ashram permanently, I received a reply written by Sriji Nolini Kanta Gupta, the secretary, on behalf of the Mother, that for the present a temporary stay was permitted, as the time for consideration of a permanent stay had not yet come. When I arrived, it was at a very critical moment in my life. A long, difficult and adventurous journey was ahead—to be completed only by the Grace of the Mother.

As a rule, in those days, the Mother saw people the very day they arrived. So at ten in the morning I followed Nolinida, who led me up to the small Darshan-room in the Meditation House, where the Mother was waiting. Her first question to me, after a short meditation at Her feet, was: "When did you take up the yoga?" She seemed pleased with my answer, and after a few more minutes She graciously blessed me and the nodding of Her head indicated that I could go. Later on I came to know the Mother's remark about me, "He has good receptivity but the vital is weak."

I returned to my room, naturally full of happiness. In the afternoon, quite unexpectedly, a young sadhak, who had joined the Ashram two years earlier and who was staying in the room next to mine, came to me. He looked at me somewhat inquisitively and asked which province I hailed from. Upon hearing my reply, a spontaneous but mild remark slipped off his tongue: "You see, the people of your province are good for nothing. Their sadhana is to read the *Arya* and other big books, to do painting, to sing, to compose music, to go for regular walks on the beach and to meditate. Whereas we do work in the Ashram. So they call us 'Das' (labour class). But I tell you, if you really want to know what the Mother is, you must work. Only then will you physically feel Her shakti. Otherwise you will miss the chance however much you read and meditate." Evidently, refinement was not his strong point, but

his words left a strong impression on me. Maybe I wanted to verify the truth behind his unasked-for observation, which was undoubtedly for me a big grace from the Mother, and all that on the very day of my arrival!

I at once decided to work. I approached another neighbour whom I had known before, and proposed to meet Nolinida so I could ask for some work. He agreed to take me the next morning. But, to my surprise, he told me that very night, on his return from the "Soup", that Nolinida had spoken to the Mother after the Soup ceremony and that She had been rather amused and surprised at my request. She instructed him to give some light work in the Library, because I was sickly at that time. Thus on the second day of my stay I joined work in the Ashram. Later still, I began to realise what was behind the first caution of my friend, behind the surprise of the Mother at my having asked for work, the attitude of some of the old associates of Sri Aurobindo who had left the place, and of the new batch of devoted workers who had recently joined the Ashram, most of whom were not intellectuals.

It was not until the third day that the Mother permitted me to attend the morning Pranam, which in those days took place in the present room of Bula, and the evening Soup, which was then being distributed by Her from the Soup Hall, now the Reception Room of the Ashram. Many, I heard, had to wait quite a long time for permission for these two opportunities. Some have already described this Soup ceremony, so I need not go into the details except for some personal experiences. It was in the evening that this function was held and there was a dim light burning near the place where the Mother sat with Her feet resting upon a low stool. She would first meditate and as She opened Her eyes, Champaklal would bring the soup vessel, a big cylindrical container with handles, and place it before Her. After putting it on a stool he removed the lid; then over the steaming vapour the Mother stretched forth and brought down Her hands and held them there for half a minute or so. Then each one went to Her with their cup in which she would pour the soup. During this time they made pranam at Her feet, then got up to receive the cup from Her hand.

She explained to someone that when She brought down Her palms She invoked Sri Aurobindo on the soup, and when the soup, so blessed, entered the body it acted on the cells to help transform them. That was the central truth of it, but individual experiences varied. After pranam at Her feet I would raise my head up and look at Her with my hands stretched forward to receive the soup cup. Often She was in trance and Her eyes would suddenly open and with a wonderful smile on Her lips She would communicate much more than by explaining to me in mere words. Not things philosophical or some deep spiritual experience, but things we call practical, of day-to-day life, solutions to problems of the past day or of the next, what I should or should not do, all these and in the most minute detail, was received from Her in those few seconds. The whole body felt as if it was filled with something, with the sense of a purified and raised consciousness. There were days when She did not open Her eyes at all, not even to give the cup to me. I almost had to pull it out of Her hand in order to allow the next person's turn to come. This meant to me that perhaps I was not

open to Her that day. Often, on the succeeding day¹ when I did not follow Her indication from the previous evening Soup-time, things did not go well in peace and harmony. This was a constant factor in my life. But the Mother always gives precious things too easily, so my human nature failed to appreciate properly and to realise the purpose behind—to help me change my nature. It quickly turned them into mechanical routine. Thus when it became a habitual movement for the majority of the Ashramites, it was a foregone conclusion that in the inner world the decision was already there to stop it.

Throughout my life in the Ashram it has been a constant experience that the Mother always gives the chance to approach Her and receive from Her things divine in many forms, but after some time we turn it into something mechanical, valuable only in the earthly way: to have the right, the privilege to approach Her and receive things that others cannot have. Then it stops after some time. She does not stop the movement by giving a notice or explanation. She has infinite patience; She allows it to continue for quite a long time giving the utmost chance to ignorant people to be conscious and take the right attitude and receive things in the true spiritual way for the transformation of their being. But when the old way persists sometimes for years together, She falls sick, because of our lack of receptivity, and thus inevitably the movement stops. It begins after sometime in a new form, suitable to the new conditions. In the case of the Soup this was so.

One day, I heard later, some sadhak, a so-called medical man, made some critical remarks on the Soup in front of the Mother, saying it had no food value at all, being left to boil for hours. The Mother, seemingly surprised, made a soft remark, "Do you think so?" Perhaps that was enough indication that the time had come to stop the Soup, and not long after the day came.

The Mother was indisposed due to over-exertion in visiting various departments of workmen, who were celebrating the Ayudha Puja. The Soup was stopped automatically and along with it the morning Pranam. It was 19th October 1931; one whole month She was indoors. Just a few days before the 24th November Darshan, She was able to come down for the morning Pranam in the hall below in the Meditation House. The spiritual record of it is there² in Her diary, on the last page of Her *Prières et Méditations*, dated the 24th November 1931.

To return to the Soup ceremony, which was so mystical and profound. One night the Mother looked smilingly at me and held my eyes while giving the soup cup to my hand. Later that night Nolinida communicated Her message to me that She had seen a star at the centre of my heart emanating four rays, which had something to do with the four powers of the Mother. The same thing was repeated the next day. Nolinida called me and told it to me again adding that the Mother had said I should be careful. "Careful about what?" I asked him. He said the Mother had meant that I should be careful in my daily movements, so as not to disturb something that was growing in me.

During those days, generally in the afternoons, I would go for a long walk with

some of my elderly friends, whom I had known before and who were now for me very respectable and advanced yogis, specially since I was a novice newly arrived. However, their conduct fully justified the caustic remarks made by my friend on my first day in the Ashram. The whole walking hour was devoted to gossip about everything under the sun, and in the most ordinary way. New lamb that I was, I swallowed everything with relish and argued with myself when the conscience pricked, saying, "It was the spiritually enlightened way of seeing things." Within a week's time I began to feel dull when I approached the Mother at Pranam time or at Soup. I felt quite empty. I then realised the meaning of the Mother's message to me, 'to be careful'!

After three days I was allowed by the Mother to join the group for the Morning Pranam. I found it quite different from my arrival day's pranam at Her feet. Now Her look penetrated my eyes as if She read through them my secret thoughts, feelings and actions, of which I had not yet become aware. I gradually began to discover, by Her constant silent communications, that much of my ignorance was really a pretension. It was a great chance given by Her to all, to convey silently to Her their individual needs, questions or aspirations and to receive Her directions for what they should or should not do. She transmitted Her message through flowers, separate for each person. She had given each flower a significance, and through that we had to decipher Her spiritual message.

Amal was my senior by one year in the Ashram. I lived for some time in the same Guest House with him, so I used to visit him, as he was ever generous to allow it, and I saw him painting some of the flowers for the Mother, with the messages, that those flowers carried, written below. I got the impulse to do the same with the flowers that I was getting from her every day. So I began, and sent some of the drawings with Nolinida to the Mother, along with Her messages as I had received them through the flowers of the day. She remarked about my paintings, "He has the capacity but needs practice." As for the messages, I heard from Nolinida that on some days, 'they were exact'. On some occasions the remark was, 'almost correct', on others 'he is now writing with the mind.' A puzzle to me! What is writing with the mind? Man always writes with the mind! Nolinida was kind enough to explain to me that, instead of quietly receiving the Mother's hints spontaneously from within, I was trying by the external mind to construct a sentence by combining meanings of the flowers; this defeated Her purpose. A new revelation to me. But gradually this opportunity was also lost, like many others. Instead of trying to concentrate on one's self-discovery, we began to look at each other's flowers and complained that some got better flowers than others. Thus along with the stopping of the Soup the morning Pranam was also stopped, in October 1931. A month later, just before the 24th November Darshan, when hardly recovered from serious illness, She was gracious enough to come down again to accept the Pranam in the morning, so as to prepare the disciples for the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. But this time the form of the Pranam was completely changed. It was no longer in the room where one could approach Her in privacy,

but in the open verandah in the Meditation House, downstairs in front of Amrita's room, where we all sat together and looked at each person approaching the Mother, instead of concentrating on how to stand in Her Presence. No longer different flowers to every person this time; She gave the same flower and only one to each.

The dining room in those days was inside the Ashram compound, not even a room but a small tiled shed only, where not more than fifteen people could sit together and eat. No visitor was allowed there, only the sadhaks went there for food, and that also in two batches, due to shortage of space. Servants carried food to the guests in their rooms. There were only enamelled pots, not even tiffin carriers. After some-time I was given the opportunity to go there for some light work, evidently with the approval of the Mother, to spread the carpets (actually narrow mats) and arrange the Japanese-style small tables on the floor, but not to take my own food there. After three months someone left and there was a vacant seat, so I was given permission to take my food there. This was the first time since I came to the Ashram that I had a chance to eat in the dining room. The experience was no less solemn than going for meditation. We would all go in and take our seats as the bell was rung; the same bell perhaps that is rung today in the palatial building that is now our Dining Room. An incense stick was lit to add to the sacred atmosphere, and each one would turn to his dish prayerfully, in an attitude of offering the food to the Divine within. I do not say that this atmosphere was maintained at all the three meals of the day. I was told that it had been far more intense before, when the Mother had come to the dining room Herself every day and tasted each item which was then taken by all as prasad. But after sometime that opportunity was also lost, apparently due to the Mother's lack of time, but actually because of a general failure in maintaining the attitude pure enough. Later Sri Aurobindo wrote that people's attitude towards food was responsible.

Gradually I became accustomed to the work in the dining room, but unfortunately also to the old egoistic attitude towards my fellow workers. I fell a prey to the lower vital's impure reactions that seemed to spring spontaneously from within me. I also copied others, thinking that to be the real way of progress in sadhana. The process of opening myself to the influence of the Mother and obeying Her will, always looking at my own defects and drawbacks, was replaced by reports and complaints to Her against the others, always presenting myself to be guiltless or less guilty. It was this that later on was surely responsible for my change of work, although the Mother was extremely patient and compassionate and allowed me to grow in that wild way for a long time.

An incident comes to mind that happened during my first days of stay in the Ashram. Dara in those days became interested in taking photographs of many of the Ashram inmates. I took a fancy to collect some of them and seek autographs of the sadhaks on the pictures, just for my own collection. It certainly was a newcomer's enthusiasm to come in contact with some of the veteran sadhaks. Some readily agreed and autographed also. I approached Nolinida, and he declined. To him it appeared a wrong movement, because in the Ashram only Sri Aurobindo and

the Mother gave autographs. This naturally hurt me but did not fail to make an impression on me. Then, after some others with whom I had succeeded, I approached Pavitra, about whom I had heard very interesting stories even before I came to the Ashram, and who since then has been to me a true child of the Mother. So as soon as I came here I took the earliest opportunity to meet him, even though people told me that he was one of the three persons in those days, with whom nobody was to talk without the Mother's permission. He kept the photo with him and told me to see him the next day. What a shock and surprise was in store for me, when he told me the day after that he had asked the Mother about it and that She had not approved. Embarrassed and sorry, I asked him whether the Mother was displeased. He assured me very sweetly that She was not displeased. What She meant was that to give autographs was to communicate some power and She did not see any necessity for that in this case. After Nonilida, this was again a lesson to me; more so, because the attitude of Pavitra to refer everything to the Mother, even things which appeared small to the common point of view, was an unforgettable pointer to me, even though I often forgot it.

December 25, 1929 is a date I particularly remember for two reasons. It was perhaps the first Christmas day celebration of that period. In the evening after returning from the Soup Hall and before going up to Her room the Mother distributed some small green leaves from the stairs, in the Meditation House. Just before She began the distribution, She said, "These leaves are called New Birth; not a new birth in the body but a birth in the new consciousness. These will be given to all, and according to each one's receptivity will be the realisation." Then She started giving a bunch of those leaves to each one in turn. The appearance of Her face was remarkable, the embodied Divine was present before all.

As the distribution was coming to a close, Nolinida discovered that Barinda had not yet arrived and asked me to fetch him immediately. What a strange situation to find that Barinda was not in his room. By the time I returned to inform about it the Mother had gone up. Next morning both Nolinida and Amrita visited Barinda's room and found a letter addressed to Sri Aurobindo on a table. Later I learned that he had written to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother saying that he was leaving the Ashram. Later still there were some communications of Sri Aurobindo, which were published, explaining the difficulty of a strong self-centred egoistic man to surrender to the Mother.

I felt sorry for Barinda having left the Ashram. As one of the pioneers of Sri Aurobindo's historic Bengal Revolutionary movement, and later, after his return from the Andamans life-imprisonment cell, he became a staunch follower and organiser of Sri Aurobindo's new line of spiritual development. It was unthinkable that he had left. But by then I had come to realise that many of the old-timers could not bring themselves to surrender their outer life to the Mother. In fact complete surrender even today is never an easy thing. Yet today's Ashram has an advantage, as people with a slight opening can fit in as workers in any of the hundreds of activities, provided they accept the Mother's decision as final. Question of surrender, even incomplete,

does not come up, unless the person behaves in a hostile way. This opportunity which the Mother is giving now was unthinkable then, and unthinkable anywhere in the world today where a spiritual discipline for the development of the consciousness is the first object. But in the case of people like Barinda, and specially in those days of intense sadhana, as the Mother was bringing down the higher Truth and Light in a sweeping succession, the slightest delay in accepting Her ways and directions was a positive hindrance. And the more advanced the sadhak the more difficult it was for him to accept the principle of complete surrender, because it meant the complete rejection of all he had done and achieved in the past and to become a perfect zero and begin anew. This was possible for none except the Mother when She came to Sri Aurobindo the first time in 1914. In Her diary She has kept that history for posterity, the experiences of Her first few days' contact with Sri Aurobindo.

And a still more interesting thing is that to this very Barinda once Sri Aurobindo said, in answer to his question regarding Sri Aurobindo's first impressions of the Mother, vis-à-vis Her's of Him. Sri Aurobindo told Barinda that even before coming to Pondicherry he had realised that the descent of the Supermind was inevitable and for that the one indispensable condition on the part of the human being was a complete surrender to the Divine, down to the physical. There had been attempts of this before, but none had succeeded. He had never seen an example of complete surrender until he had seen the Mother. In Her he saw the complete surrender down to the very cells of the body, and thus he was convinced that now the time had come for the Supramental to manifest.

I could clearly see that one of the rare old inmates was Nolinida, who found no difficulty in adjusting himself to the situation. Once a newcomer, a person of importance and at the same time admirer of Nolinida, asked him point blank, "Didn't you have any difficulty, like many others, in accepting the Mother?" His spontaneous reply was, "No, I had no difficulty whatsoever; when Sri Aurobindo accepted Her there was no question of my not doing so."

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A year later circumstances led me to volunteer work in another department with the Mother's approval. There was a paid workman also to help along with a small boy. The man was a technician, but an indifferent fellow, and I a novice just learning the work. Once it happened that the small boy, who carried the ladder from place to place, did not turn up for several days and the paid man would not touch the ladder. He was too proud of his dignity for such a petty job! So I prayed to the Mother to appoint another boy to carry the ladder. The Mother exclaimed with surprise, "What! two people cannot carry a ladder? I do not understand!" I felt shocked at first that She wanted me to do a coolie's job for this paid man, who refused to touch the ladder! But I realised that in any case I had to obey Her and pass through the ordeal. First my own superiority complex had to be thrown aside if I wanted to work

for the Divine. So I did the job the next day. Seeing me lifting the ladder the workman grumbled and after a while very unwillingly lent his hand. Later the Mother obliged me to do all such work myself, and pointed out to me that it was the only way to be a successful leader of co-workers, otherwise they would have no true feeling and respect for me and would find every opportunity to cheat me and sink into a demoralised condition.

I had been in the Ashram about two years when an elderly friend of mine came for a visit. I was indebted to him very much because in my earlier days he had helped make it possible for me to come here. So naturally it was a great pleasure for me to meet him again. But during the two months he remained here, I could not visit him as often as both of us would have liked, because by then I was fully engrossed in quite a number of different works; and the greatest attraction of it was that I had more opportunities than many others to see the Mother and talk to Her and get Her instructions.

One day he remarked, "Why do you busy yourself all the time with so much work? Did the Mother give you so many jobs or do you do them of your own accord?" I explained to him, "The Mother does not impose work on anybody; I feel pleasure in working, so I ask Her and She approves of my doing all these jobs." He said, "You had literary talent in you and there is a good library here, why not take advantage of that and try to be a literary man, doing a half day's work and a half day's study?" His advice appealed to me, it sounded reasonable; yet I was not quite convinced inwardly. So I talked about it to Pavitra. The next day he surprised me by saying that he had spoken to the Mother about my conversation with my friend, and very spontaneously She had said, "Yes, yes, otherwise how to become useless?" The next day, on our first meeting, the Mother said jokingly, "So, you are going to be a literary genius?" I felt very much ashamed and said, "No, Mother." It was indeed funny that I should have forgotten the warning given me on my first day by my Ashram friend!

What the Mother said does not mean that She discourages literary activity. Here was a purely individual case in a certain set of circumstances, where the spiritual development depended on following a certain line of discipline.

I used to meet some reputed sadhaks on the sly and indulge in taking tea with them, joining in their gossips which included reading fresh letters from Sri Aurobindo and finding faults with other sadhaks. I did not inform the Mother about it, as I knew She would not approve. However, the mental justification to stop the prick of conscience was never lacking: "After all, what's wrong in it? Where else would I have the opportunity to read such wonderful letters of Sri Aurobindo?" Gradually I sensed a certain reserve in the Mother's dealing with me. Unable to bear the tension, I asked Her, a few days after, what was wrong, expressing my sorrow for displeasing Her and bringing about Her indifference to me. Very kindly but jokingly the Mother asked me why I hid things from Her. Thus things got settled down in a way, but for a short time only. The vital attraction to gossip was too strong to be thrown off at once. I had no difficulty in walking away from my family to enter the Ashram,

but these apparently innocent movements would not leave me. I continued my old ways but justified them with similar arguments: "Now that the Mother knows about it, there is nothing so very serious in it, and didn't She tell me, 'Do whatever you like, but do not hide it from me? Moreover, when I told Her that I would never go anywhere again, She told me it would be good if I could do so, but She did not think I could. Didn't it mean that She did not believe me?'" After full three years of struggle, the topic came up again in one of my interviews with the Mother. She said, "You are playing about in this matter (visiting people at tea parties, etc.) .. But if you do not throw it away completely now that it has taken a more complex turn, this greed in what appears to you a very minor form will later be a major obstacle in your sadhana." I asked Her quite impertinently why She did not remove this desire from me, if it was something so serious. The Mother replied with all her tenderness, "But you are not allowing me to do it. You are not opening this part at all to my influence. Each time that I put a strong pressure on you to help you out of this disease, you very cleverly avoid it. If you had very simply come to me and frankly told me about your difficulty, your desire for this or that thing, I would have seen what really was needed, and how much to allow and for how long. By now you would have been completely out of it and gone a step further. But instead of that you go on hiding it from me, and satisfy your greed by frequenting other people's places. Naturally you miss the direct help."

It was the first time in my life that I had heard such a thing, and that from the Mother! Is it believable that such silly bits could be put before her, asking for their satisfaction? All I had learned from childhood had taught me the contrary, not to ask anything from the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna had sent Vivekananda to Mother Kali to ask her redress of his family difficulties so that he could devote himself entirely to his guru; but Vivekananda tried three times and yet could not ask. Instead, he prayed for desirelessness and renunciation. In one of Rabindranath Tagore's lines we read: "He who could give you a crown for the head, you just ask for a shoe-lace from him!"

It took me years to recognise my false logic in it. If not to bother the Mother for insignificant things of human desire is to be my abiding virtue, I must be capable of removing desires completely from myself. But with many like me, this is not easy. It is only the highly developed souls that can do it all at one stroke. Sri Aurobindo did it; from the moment he decided not to allow the mind to think but to remain vacant and act according to the inner voice, from then on his whole life was guided by that principle. But for a common man who has taken up the line of spiritual development the guidance of the guru is necessary. Opening oneself to the Mother, not only for things higher and nobler, but for things small and ordinary, and to wait for Her decision and guidance—this not only helps one to progress without stumbling, but is essential for the development of the inner consciousness which will eventually lead to the discovery of the Mother inside who guides unmistakably. I wish I had understood this before, then I would not have wasted so much of the Mother's outer grace and compassion. I should have understood that even when the Mother made some concessions

for my desire to have its own way, it was just to help cure it and not go on exploiting it. When She did not sanction, in certain cases, strict discipline should have been maintained at any cost, and as I had experienced in some cases where I succeeded, the feeling of the Grace helping to cure the malady was physically palpable, and earlier than imagined the difficulty was over. But the question was of holding on.

When my parents came to know that I had settled in the Ashram permanently, my mother began to write frantic letters asking me to return. I stopped replying to her after some time, being tired and disgusted. Months later, while I was feeling at spiritual ease without being disturbed by my people at home, and for that matter was pondering whether I should not express my gratitude to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for this little piece of miracle, Nolinida brought to me a postcard from Sri Aurobindo, with the marginal comments written in his own hand, the first communication from him in my life! Overjoyed I began to read, then with a sudden shock from what I had read, I went back to the beginning and started reading again: "What is the meaning of all this, I do not understand. I hope you have not given her any understanding that it is I who have kept you here. Your temporary stay was changed into a permanent one by your prayer. And once you have decided, you should have the courage to make your people understand that clearly. Otherwise, one is free to remain here or to go as he chooses."

It was not difficult to guess the contents of the postcard. It was a letter addressed directly to Sri Aurobindo from my mother, throwing blame on him. I felt very sorry; but I felt quite uneasy as I had never given any such impression to my mother; and how was it that Sri Aurobindo did not understand that? I at once wrote a strong letter to my mother, and sent it up to Sri Aurobindo for approval, with an inner feeling of satisfaction that he would be convinced that I had enough courage to deal with my parents! Next day I got the letter back through Nolinida, the same spiritual postman; I opened the fresh envelope with my name written on it by Sri Aurobindo, and found his comments on the body of my letter to my mother: "This letter won't do. There is no use threatening your mother with all that will happen to her, which has no meaning. After Darshan I shall give you the hints of what to write. For the present you can simply write to her that you are in good health and she need not worry." Another surprise indeed, but one of unthinkable joy to me. This time I really expressed my gratitude to Them!

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In those days the departments of service were few. There was the Building Service under the devoted engineer Chandulal, the Garden Service and Pavitra's Atelier (Workshop) for mechanical and technical activities. Of course there were the Domestic Service to deal with the servants, the Prosperity for the requirements of the Ashramites, the Bakery and the Dining Room, the same as today but now increased many times over. Every detail of all the services was presented to the Mother for Her

scrutiny and approval, especially Pavitra's department. The heads of the other departments were responsible to the Mother, of course, but to some extent they had the freedom to deal with the workmen and organise the works as they felt justified. But in Pavitra's case it was the Mother who was the One and the All. She conducted everything, Pavitra only carried out Her orders. At the same time all technical details or engineering matters were worked out by him, but even for the most insignificant item it was She who would say "Yes or No" and only then did he carry it out.

In the workshop repairs to the Mother's car and its maintainance were the main job; but along with that all other electrical works, including house installations and repair jobs, water works, in the form of water canalisations from the municipal supply and repairs to taps etc. on one side, and all domestic service requirements like repairs to metal pots and tinning of cooking-vessels, as well as smithy jobs etc., on the other were all being done. In each of these Pavitra, the engineer, of the *École Polytechnique*, gave a helping hand, and all the details were presented to the Mother. It was She who decided what to do and in which order. The relation between paid workmen and the one sadhak worker, who was also Pavitra's assistant, was very sweet and friendly due to Pavitra's being the intermediary between them. Even if there was some confusion at times with the workmen and his assistant Pavitra would never give his opinion or order, but refer to the Mother and later communicate to them what had been decided by Her. In any workshop or factory outside, this at times would appear to lower his dignity, at least from the standpoint of a high-class engineer and his fellow assistant or workmen. But for him all that was of no importance. Only what the Mother wanted was all.

Once it happened that a paid workman was permitted by the Mother to come to Her for pranam every morning, not along with the sadhaks but after She had finished with them. She would come out by Pavitra's door upstairs and stand there, and the man would go up and offer his pranam. He was perhaps the first workman whom She gave this grace. Amrita said the man had originally been a mason, working in the Building Service with Chandulal. But he was a devotee and a poet. He had written some poems in Tamil on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which Amrita had translated into English and shown to Her. The Mother was evidently pleased and instructed Chandulal to send the man from his building department to Pavitra's department, where he would work as a mechanical helper. Thus he got the promotion from mason to mechanic; but unfortunately within a short time he proved himself hopelessly unfit for the work, a lazy fellow. Pavitra realised this from the facts of daily work, but he did not react in the way I did, because he knew the Mother was kind to the man and was giving him an opportunity and he accepted him for that. When the fellow came late for work, and gradually turned it into a regular habit, the Mother would say, "His house is very far, so one should be a little kind." I said he was good for nothing, but She would defend him by saying, "You people are really lacking in sympathy!" In this way every possible concession was being given to him, which was unthinkable for any other paid workman in any other department in the Ashram. At

first he brought a few flowers; but gradually the more his inefficiency in the departmental work was being overlooked by the Mother, he began to bring quite a few packets of flowers for Her, and untied them one by one and offered them at the Mother's feet, thus taking a lot of time. This delayed his joining the work still more, and also it was late for the Mother. So once, when it was later than usual and he was even slower to open the packets, I felt impatient and told him to finish his pranam first, as the Mother was standing, and the rest of the packets would be untied for him by me. The man did so, and the Mother went in comparatively early. I felt flattered at having done a good service to Her. Later in the evening Pavitra told me that the Mother had been very displeased because of my interrupting the man. She said that when the man was before Her and making pranam, he was not a workman at that time, and moreover She came at that hour for him only, so I did not need to come with him again: did I not already have my pranam earlier? A good lesson for me! Naturally I did not accompany the man after that to the Mother.

Another small incident gave me an unforgettable lesson from the Mother. One day I reported to Her about a workman, a very good and honest mechanic, who was always concentrated in his work, but on that day somehow he did not follow my words and got irritated. I tried several times to explain to him but he would not listen and became insolent in front of a dozen workmen. So I shouted at him, with the result that he at once wanted to leave the job and go away. The Mother was quite distressed with my behaviour. In part what She told me was:

"What are you here for? You are for Yoga, aren't you? And what is that man here for? To earn his livelihood, isn't he? You say the man is honest and an expert mechanic and very gentle by nature, and that it was the first time he behaved with you like that. So if you had used a little ordinary common sense, I don't speak of the yogic sense here, you would have understood that something unusually upsetting must have happened to him either in his family or out somewhere, which made him lose his balance of mind. Thus he did not understand you properly.

"Now, you who are doing Yoga should not have gone down in consciousness, and at last you even went below the person with whom you lost your temper. It will help in no way to argue and explain and counter-argue, always posing yourself to be right and the other wrong, and moreover you said that the man speaks very little English; and the most deplorable of all things was that your vanity of being the superior boss took the lead."

When I told Her that I had not actually lost myself in anger, but the man's insolent behaviour in front of so many workmen had set a bad example and so... She stopped me in the middle of my sentence and said, "All that justification belongs to a lower level of consciousness; so long as you remain there, there is no hope. If you want to serve the Divine you must always be at the top of your consciousness."

"What should I have done in that embarrassing situation?" I asked. The Mother said, "Instead of making the drama of a superior person dealing with a paid workman, you should have behaved like a loving friend and comrade, you should

have done this"—here the Mother patted my shoulder—"and laughed and told him with a kind and affectionate gesture, 'What has happened to you today? You must not be well; go and take some rest. Surely you are very tired today.' You would have seen that it would have eased the situation and brought back harmony. Whatever be the situation and whosoever the person, lack of harmony means lack of consciousness, and the one who is stronger yields. I do not mean stronger physically, but stronger in consciousness. And by one's affection and love, not by the dictionary meaning of the word, one yields to get back peace and harmony. Instead of that, you went down below the person and rubbed the animal in him in the wrong way. You are doing yoga, so this much he can expect from you?"

"Now, what shall I do, shall I go back and do as you said?" I asked. The Mother laughed and said, "No, it is too late now, it would be a rehearsed artificial drama and won't serve the purpose. It must be spontaneous, and that means from a different consciousness. Now the only thing that you can do is to concentrate on the best part of the man and pray for him, that he may get peace and balance, and when you meet him tomorrow behave as if nothing has happened. Be as natural and affectionate as can be expected of a really strong man."

I did not have to wait for the next morning. Towards the end of the day he came of himself to me, and with eyes full of tears asked pardon of me. I was struck dumb. I felt that I had lost the game and he had won it. The same night when I told this to the Mother, she said in a tone of good humour, "So you see, he is more receptive than you. Remember and offer."

One of my stumbling-blocks was that I reacted violently when people blamed me without proper grounds. At times I would even ask the Mother why she paid heed to such and such false rumours, why I should be the victim of such charges, even though I had done nothing of the kind! Her answer to me was that it did not matter whether I did or did not do some such things at that particular instance; what mattered was that previously I had proved myself capable of them, and there were reports about that. My past conduct and the present complaints were enough to show that I was still living in the same old consciousness of reactions and repeated lower movements. It was not enough to have stopped indulging in some of the movements. So long as I had not raised myself to a higher level of consciousness, and lived there constantly, such occasions would continue to be there. Only by a complete change of consciousness, and thus living above ordinary human reactions, could the atmosphere around me vibrate differently, and people would then be convinced and not try to find fault with me. And that is a task of long long years of arduous tapasya. Until then people would be justified to complain and my business was not to react but to be indifferent outwardly, while trying to find inwardly how certain apparently refined movements in me were really out of tune with my changed consciousness. And thus people's complaints would be more a help than a hindrance.

However, one who makes a complaint has to be very careful about what he says. Thus I may quote a comparatively recent message of the Mother to me when im-

pulsively I hurled a strong criticism at somebody, whose conduct, according to me, had caused an irreparable loss to us:

“When, in ignorance, one speaks ill of others, he debases his consciousness and degrades his soul.

“A respectful and modest silence is the only attitude befitting a disciple. Blessings.”

Another point about which the Mother was particular in my case was unnecessary contact with women. It was something the Mother would never tolerate. In fact there was not to be any contact with men either, which was not precisely in connection with some work for the Mother. And it was one of my diseases to be friendly with all, inwardly justifying myself that it was the sign of purity and strength. There were innumerable cases when the Mother was severe with me. At times I asked her whether she believed I would enter into some immoral contact. Her reply was revealing though I was too arrogant in the beginning to be convinced. The gist of what she told me on a number of occasions was like this: “Your idea of morality and immorality is ridiculous. You are here for yoga, to be in union with the Divine, to be all the time above all human so-called natural contacts, however high and refined you may imagine them to be. Any contact with women in your case will bring you down to subtle vital exchanges to which you are always open. Your consciousness will begin to get dulled, forces of the vital world will take advantage, and quite unawares you will be carried far into wrong tracks, even when you are quite sure of your morality remaining sound!” At times she told me, “Don’t be boastful of your strength. None has been able to keep his promise to me as yet!”

There are many who lament remembering the past days of the Ashram life, that were so calm and intense with the spirit of sadhana. When I look back on my past days, I realise how very unprepared I was, and how little of the Mother’s expectations I fulfilled. Certainly there were more opportunities, but in another form they are not lacking now. Sincere prayer to Her and constant aspiration for Her help to change the consciousness is miraculously responded to, as quickly as it was before. Only, I must be unceasingly vigilant that my acts do not take the form of some show or self-satisfaction even in doing service to the Divine.

My first day’s advice from the friend, when I reached the Ashram, ‘that it is only through work that you shall realise what the Mother really is,’ remains ever true for me. Although the Ashram has expanded a hundredfold, and all works are being done for the Mother, yet Her true workers, sincere and reliable, are not many. Without trying to appear humble I may record that I am only one of the many.

WHEN THE MOTHER SMILES

EACH time we see the Mother smile, we cannot but remember some lines of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. There is the passage which is part of his description of Savitri herself :

Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.

There is also that single line which seems to say everything:

They that have looked on her shall grieve no more.

Naturally, it means a great deal to us when the Mother smiles and it is equally natural that her non-smiling creates a big gap in our life. But neither the one nor the other means always the same thing, and an attempt at some understanding of them would be useful. We may hazard a few statements based on experience.

When the Mother does not smile at us, it need not indicate that she is displeased. She may be absorbed in doing some work on our inner being. When she smiles, it also need not signify that she is particularly pleased. The smile may be a means of doing something to the outer being. But one point is certain : whenever the true soul in us comes to the front, she invariably gives it a smile.

This smile really signals her pleasure. But it is otherwise difficult to ascertain what her smiling or not smiling stands for. Hence, even if she does not shed her smile on us, we must never feel depressed. We, on our side, should always keep smiling. Not, of course, out of complacency or out of indifference to her displeasure, but out of a firm faith that, howsoever she deals with us, it is always as our spiritual Mother, one whose love is eternal and perfect. For, as Sri Aurobindo has said, "Whatever is done by the Mother is for the good of the sadhaka and the sadhana."

If a smile remains long on our faces, there is bound to be a smile on hers as well. Through that smile of ours—trusting, hopeful, filled with gratitude for her very presence amongst us—our true soul will look out at its spiritual Mother and then her pleasure in her own child will shine forth.

AMAL KIRAN

The Mother's comment when this was read out to her: "I am smiling."

AFTER READING SRI AUROBINDO'S "SYNTHESIS OF YOGA"

WORDS that are no longer words
but music from another world,
slow plangent waves
that roll into the shores of time
from mere infinity drawn near.

The waves roll in
swelling the mind to silence
with some immense serenity
that from the rock of language struck
sings forth its sounding mystery.

Be still, be still and garner the sweet prose, my soul,
within the corners of your heart and know the thronging air grows bold
with kindred helping souls.
The dome of heaven grows clear and pure
and purer yet, unbearably pure.

Read on and see your shining being rise to catch the music
upon your outstretched palm.
Rise, shining child, into the depths of heaven
where music gathered like one sharp clear star, a sharp and crystal seal
stamps painfully forevermore your knowing
with the mystery defined, unsealed, unravelled.
Pause there a while, in the silence,
the silence between the phrases,
with mind grown blind.

And gravid with light and with heaven
descend once again from the stars,
descend the darkening stairway:
there are curtains ruffling your mind.

Yet you know when you have finished reading,
within, you carry man's fate like the great dome
of heaven opened upon the infinite,
have been cradled in the hands of God,
let gently down through the darkness
and set here to radiate.

AFTER HEARING THE CENTENARY NEW YEAR MUSIC*

No longer glimpses, gleams or corridors of light
But light cascading undiminished,
Carolling and quick and bright,
God-music beckoning, God-music beckoning.

At first too stunned, too unaware to heed
We looked
And let the plectrum skate and slide upon the mirror of our soul
Then pluck a first deep chord like ruby's light.
Another shook and opened wide the door
On trembling matter's ear
And plunged within a hand to tune our substance to the dawn
Of change from night to light,
From dead to living day.

Pluck long arpeggios of deep, of strong delight from our deep sleeping,
Pry loose our timid, nestling, guarded hearts
And make our beings sing and dance like this, like this, like music
No unawakened voice may say;
At last, at last the first clear sign:
Earth's untried tongue will learn to sing,
Will rise against the palate of the skies
And ring and ring and ring.

From mountain peak to moving mountain peak
The message sounds and grows and echoes
And tells a word not occult but revealed;
A word both passionless and pure,
Earth's seas and trees and soil enriching it,
Sovereign, all there is and sure :

Earth, you are born anew,
Baptised by music's reign.
You will sing and dance with Gods.
Your children are immortal,
Deep night has flown like mist.
You will not be the same again.

'LEAVES OF ALABASTER'

No moon is sightless ivory—
No beam is darkly silver-marked

Bright, sky-touched,
Upon green waters
White Bougainvillia
Among the purple
In mellow winds
Dangling drift.

Hushed nights
Stilled days
In all
Peace pervades.
I go my mooned or moonless way
Amid unborn colonnades—
Each step a silent spark of next-ness
Heaven-sent.

All cries of heart are mine
Transmuted, fixed—
A call and avenue of grace.
In hand, the tiger's tail is never loose
(Danger in full breath lives—)
I cannot die.

Alone, I find companioned fields;
Vast impertinent glories of the mud—
Now faced without ideas,
Traced with love.

Open, moon! Thy alabaster trail—
Weave now the gold-and-silver-threaded prisoner's beams.
Asleep; awake; it is Beauty's deed that dreams.

GENE MASLOW

ETERNAL TRAVELLER

(BASED ON TWO BENGALI POEMS)

I

Do not loiter on the way, O traveller—but march on.
In the midst of the market-place, stand not, swelling the din and wrangle around.
Words beget words, they fail to appease the thirst of the Soul,
Plunge deep within in silence.
Let not such a moment pass.
If the doors of the dense wall have at last given way,
Do not put them up again.

Make your path your friend, for the path itself is the Mother's transforming abode.
You will find an avalanche of Grace descending upon you.
Flowers will bloom on either side of your road,
Pluck them as freely as you want.
Strew them around in the dust when they have been offered to the Divine,
But tread not over those offerings.
Also beware of driving away from your door the chanter of the New Dawn.

Enliven the cadence of your eternal march,
You will ever be guided from the depth of your heart,
Cleanse your nature of the filth that is falsehood.
Surrender: do not merely respond!
Draw not away your hand from the grip of the Protecting Mother.
Create not a storm to shake the stones of the temple aspiring to the Unforeseen.

2

Hearken! the Supreme is calling.
Does it touch your heart?
Come one, come all, whoever desires to travel the Path of Infinity,
The Path that begins where all the others end.
Come—whoever aspires to be a seeker of the All-New.
Come—whoever wants to surrender body and mind and soul to this grand
untrodden Way.

With one-pointed vision, without fear march on
Though the country be difficult to cross.
What if your road be a razor's edge?
You will find in the end wealth immeasurable.
Aspire with a spirit undaunted,
Leaving behind all sense of uncertainty.
If your feet do not falter by the close counsel of your thought,
Then who is there on this earth to bar your onward march?

ARUNA

NO SELF-BEFOOLING

DARE not to deal with things of Truth and God
With deception or insincerity in heart,
For the bomb of Truth may suddenly explode
In thy smart face and leave thee bruised and charred.

Truth is a power, a fire, a light and love;
Let not world's clever wisdoms over thee ride;
Leave thyself simply to it lest it prove
A violent ruin of thy guarded pride.

To be unburdened of falsehood make thy craving,
Become but nothing and nothing more and more,
There is only one thing in the world worth having
That She may in thy pureness Her Love pour.

O man, O fragile man, if thou couldst be
Empty and free of clever falsity!

HAR KRISHAN SINGH

THE MAGICAL CAROUSEL

A ZODIACAL ODYSSEY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

(Continued from the issue of July, 1972)

(This is the story of a being in manifestation. The children represent two complementary poles within the individual. It is also a treatment of astrology, each image evoked being a key to the deeper meaning of the signs.)

CHAPTER VI

The New-born

THUD! Clunk!

Val and Pom-Pom reach the end of their journey. They find themselves at the bottom of the chimney stack, packed tightly against a metal gate, one on top of the other. Val calls to Pom-pom on the bottom:

"Try to open the gate."

"Gate, what gate?" responds Pom-pom. "Oh! I can't see! Val, I can't see anymore!"

Val is terrified. Being so upset by the words of her brother, she manages to arrange herself so that she can see what is wrong with him. Standing on her head with her legs and feet up in the air, she says,

"It's your crown, little Prince Pom-pom," rather irritated at having been so inconvenienced and made to worry uselessly. "Get your crown out of your eyes and I'm sure you'll see something to help us out of this place!"

Their situation is really very difficult because not only are they squashed in a position that makes any manoeuvre almost impossible, but they are also fearful of making too much noise, not knowing where they are and what sort of creatures might be awaiting them.

For a long while they remain like this trying to think of a way out of this new dilemma, entirely forgetting Glow's instructions, the keys, everything. Still on her head Val manages to turn slightly toward the grating and there to her joy she sees a 9 and the symbol Δ .

"Pom-pom," she cries, "it's a new land! We've come to a new land. Quickly, get the 9th key. We're here!"

Pom-pom does what he is told as best he can in the circumstances, and fishes out

key number 9. Coming close to the lock he sees the symbol \mathfrak{M}^1 and the number 6!

"You mean number 6," he says.

"What 6, it's a 9. Hurry!" she replies.

Now Pom-pom's a very clever little boy and he knows a 6 from a 9, perhaps he can't write very well, but he does know his numbers and a 6 is a 6 and a 9 is a 9.

In the cramped chimney stack they start arguing and Val, finally ending up the other way around somehow, sees that the 9 has become a 6. She quickly forgets her embarrassment, uses the key to open the gate and they both tumble out onto the chimney bed.

From this little nook they are able to examine what lies before them. A very neat place indeed! Everything is in proper order and so clean. The room has a little table in the centre with flowers and bread and a pitcher of milk. A cozy bed nestles in one corner. Outside the room they hear sounds of busy feet rushing here and there, machines working, water flowing,—sounds of a very active place.

The children come out of the chimney and stretch their shaken bodies. What a way to travel, but at least they seem to have arrived on time.

Before going on they decide to drink some of the milk and perhaps rest a bit. They are about to pick up the pitcher when from behind them come shrieks and screams of women in quite a panic:

"Grimey creatures, filthy little things!"

"How dare you come into our house and dirty everything!"

"Get out! Go back where you came from."

What a fright for Val and Pom-pom, who never thought themselves dirtier than any normal children. They whirl around to see a group of middle-aged ladies in the doorway, holding brooms and wash-cloths and dust mops, looking very stern and irritated.

But where can they go? Glow said they were supposed to continue their journey. How can they climb back up the chimney stack?

They turn toward each other and instantly burst into peals of laughter on seeing themselves covered from head to foot in the darkest of soot, and Pom-pom's little crown perched lopsided on his head to make him all the more absurd. They laugh and laugh completely forgetting the irritated ladies who impatiently wait for the children to disappear from their cleanest of clean houses!

The group approaches, ready to sweep the children away, when one of them notices the almost unrecognisable crown. She nervously calls her companions into a huddle where they ardently discuss the matter in whispers so as not to let the children hear.

Finally they decide on an action and pick Val and Pom-pom up by the back of their suits, careful to keep them at a distance. The party marches off down a long

¹ This symbol is not entirely correct; the M should not have a loop on top but its tail should sweep up and close inside. The significance of this is explained in the notes at the end of the chapter.

hallway. All along the way the children see rooms on either side in which many ladies are busily working at something or other. Some clean, others sew, some wash, others iron, and so on. They are all dressed in long white aprons and have their hair tucked in caps, like old-fashioned nurse maids.

At long last they enter a chamber that seems to be a waiting room. A woman seated at a desk asks in a very matter-of-fact but rather disgusted manner who is to be announced and what the nature of their business is. She is told—in hushed whispers once again—and then quickly arises, opens an adjoining door and announces:

“DUBIOUS ARRIVALS IN STATE OF EXTREME UNCLEANLINESS ARE BROUGHT TO ASCERTAIN THE NATURE OF THEIR STATUS.”

The door is opened wide and all the maids enter with Val and Pom-pom still dangling by their clothes. Neat stacks of papers and ledgers cover a desk in the middle of a medium-sized room. A kindly looking lady sits behind it, very prim and proper with tiny spectacles resting on the tip of her nose. She is dressed in much the same fashion as the other ladies but is distinguished from them by a special cap and a medal worn over her heart that reads:

**AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING
SERVICE
TO
MISS LILY SPOTLESS**

She asks the ladies to explain the situation at which point they all begin talking at once, bickering, criticising each other, the children, everything. Miss Spotless finally puts a stop to it all by dismissing them. Alone with the children, she begins to question them.

“Where have you come from and how did you enter our institution?”

Val begins telling of their stay in Leoland and of all the amusements and feasting. She is interrupted by Miss Lily Spotless.

“An obvious reason for your present unclean condition: all that pleasure. We’ll have no more of it! You have now come to Virgoland and on this day, August 23rd, our special course in hygiene, diet and service begins. Since you are here and in such a state you must take part.”

She now asks, in a rather tactful and somewhat fearful way, why Pom-pom is wearing a crown.

“He is heir to the throne of the King of Day!” Val blurts out, rather proud of her little brother.

“Heir to the throne!” she gasps, and immediately starts ringing buzzers and calling her assistants. The maidens come in and Lily Spotless begins giving instructions, most of which Val and Pom-pom do not understand.

“Three baths—Four rinses.

“Check calorie intake.

"No sweets, candies and cakes.

"Control intestinal functions. Immaculate, both inside and out!

"Physical fitness to bring about a proper mental attitude. Physical fitness, do you understand?" she emphasises. "Wash the body and you will wash the mind!" She turns to the children: "A clean body, that's what you'll get in Virgoland, and for a future king nothing is more important!" saying this she very humbly bows before Pom-pom, who is so embarrassed at this gesture that his soot-covered face turns a few shades darker.

The attitude of all the maidens toward Val and Pom-pom has changed considerably; now they are all very anxious to please and quick to carry out Lily Spotless's instructions. Two huge baskets are summoned and the children are placed inside and carried off to another part of the house. They enter a large room full of steam emerging from giant vats overflowing with soap bubbles. Val and Pom-pom are quickly undressed and then deposited in the waiting tubs. One maiden carefully removes Pom-pom's crown and takes it to another room along with their clothes to be laundered.

What a sight! All that can be seen are two soot-covered faces in the midst of billowy white bubbles.

Scrub-a-rub-dub! Scrub-a-rub-a-rub-a-dub!

After a thorough washing all the maidens give exclamations of joy when Val and Pom-pom emerge in their original state, like two untouched, new-born babies who have never known dirt. They are wrapped in great towels and taken to another room where their hair is washed, dried and combed. Their laundered clothes are brought in and the children are dressed once more, and Pom-pom given his crown, now shiny and gloriously clean.

Next they are brought into another room where they are examined from head to toe and drilled on what they should and shouldn't eat. Quite often the ladies disagree among themselves and argue as to what's really best for the two. On and on this goes; they are taken first here, then there, given special diets and instructions. After the maidens seem to have carried out all of the orders they return Val and Pom-pom to Lily Spotless's office and are dismissed. Then Miss Spotless solemnly addresses the children:

"A King must serve! This is the only proper attitude." She speaks making great efforts to control her emotions, but it is obvious to Val and Pom-pom that she is very much moved by what she is telling them ... "and *work*! He must work more than anyone, all day and even all night if necessary. There's no time for pleasure and fun in a King's life. It is work and service, and that is what you must stay here in Virgoland to learn. The preliminary course ends today, September 22nd, and now you are fit to begin the formal training so that by next year we can return you to Leoland, in condition to carry on with your duties and service to the kingdom."

By this time she has regained absolute control of herself and with these words stands up straight as if called to attention by some higher official, but of course there

is no one around.

Pom-pom cries out: "But I don't want to be King. I don't want to work all day "...

"... and besides," interrupts Val, "it's time to leave. We must leave right now. Pom-pom, give her the crown. Take it off!"

Pom-pom places the crown on the desk. They all remain silent, staring at it in its glorious, clean brilliance.

"You renounce the crown, you renounce the crown," says Lily Spotless in a timid, shocked voice.

Quite upset and nervous, she doesn't really know how to act. She fidgets and fuses, taps on her desk with her fingers and can't seem to make up her mind.

"...renouncing the crown...ahem...ah ...so that's the case, is it?...Ahem...er..."

The fact is she has never faced such a situation and doesn't quite know how to solve it, and also she begins to worry about the complications that could arise. What if she is dismissed from her position because of this episode in *her* institution? Left with no work and nothing but idle time on her hands?...Horrors! What if she loses her medal.. .Horror of horrors!

On and on she goes, imagining all sorts of things that could happen and fretting about mere possibilities.

"Oh no! This will never do! My mind is in such a state..." she thinks, "I must get rid of these creatures somehow, without causing offense to anyone, and put my institution back in order. Then maybe my mind will be straightened out again!"

Lily Spotless is really quite quick when it comes to finding ingenious solutions. She announces:

"This is a fine moment, a fine moment indeed! You have renounced your crown for a higher service, a service to benefit all and not just one realm. Remarkable! Truly praiseworthy and a grand example for all little heirs!"

She rings for her employees, gives several quick instructions and the whole lot then parades off. They join the entire institution gathered in a very large assembly hall, in the centre of which an elaborate and finally wrought elevator awaits.

Lily Spotless makes a speech before the group, telling of the children's merits and honourable gesture. She calls to her aide who steps forward with a box bearing two medals on which the following inscription is written:

AWARD FOR SERVICE RENDERED
TO
A HIGHER CAUSE

and pins one on Val's chest and the other on Pom-pom's.

The assembly applauds and before Val and Pom-pom can understand what is happening they are placed in the elevator. The gate is snapped shut and quickly locked, to assure that they don't cause some unexpected trouble on another floor.

And so, very much relieved, Lily Spotless pushes the button. The elevator rises and inside Val and Pom-pom are completely puzzled as to what this is all about, where they are being sent and what all the scrubbing and cleaning was really for. Up and up they go, so high that the whole assembly hall below appears to be an anthill, and the maidens of the institution just many, many busy little ants rushing to and fro.

Virgo is an Earth sign, feminine and of Mutable Energy Quality. It completes the first half of the wheel and here we can review all the play of energy so far. In Aries and Cancer, the Cardinal signs, the children are willfully released from the lands. In Taurus and Leo, both signs of Fixed energy, they are held back by Malamulapaga and the King of Day, and after a powerful ordeal are involuntarily released. In the Mutable signs, Gemini and Virgo they are sent out but without great conviction, hence the reluctant change so typical of the Mutable signs. The reader is once again reminded that each situation in the story corresponds to the intrinsic significance of the sign's function and contribution to the whole.

In Virgo we are presented with the New-born; that which was gestated in Cancer is here brought forth, hence the symbolic position of the children in the chimney stack and their seeing 6's and 9's which form the hieroglyphic symbol of Cancer; in fact, the position they find themselves in the beginning of this chapter is representative of the Cancer symbol which depicts the foetal position.

The hieroglyph of Virgo indicates the vital current in its dormant state, the unawakened Kundalini, the unreleased energy,—this is the true meaning of the symbol of the virgin. The sign is governed by Mercury which happens to rule the spine in the human body, so here we are even given the location of the channel through which the current will pass; but as yet the current lies dormant and it is only through development of the higher faculties that the "rise" takes place further on. Thus Virgo is a sign of ablution and libation, the preliminary purification. The origin of the rites of baptism can be understood from this sign, as well as the Christian idea of original sin. The children come into the land in an unclean state because of the "fall" and are promptly dipped in water to wash away the soot, the impurities of ego. This is only a preliminary preparation, indicating that the soul now is ready to pass into the upper half of the wheel, out of darkness, through light and back to the Origin.

(To be continued)

PATRIZIA

LIFE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL

(Continued from the issue of July 1972)

GOD AND LIFE

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

IN the Ashrams of ancient times there was no conflict between spiritual progress and the development of other aspects of life. They were at once the sacred places for sadhana and the centres of those arts which discipline, elevate and enrich life. The children brought up there were taught many subjects which contributed to the fullness of life.

• There is no demarcation in our Centre of Education between recreational and educational services though the sphere of each is different. Along with well-equipped playing facilities, there is provision of sound health and nutrition services. In order to light a spark of consciousness in the inert body, scientific movements of limbs are essential. They overcome the inertia of matter but the physical activities of the children are not confined to such scientific movements.

Painting and photography have also their places in the Ashram. Similarly singing, dancing, playing musical instruments and dramatic performances are part of the educational system. So are the arts of modelling clay and sand casting. Such diversions have added considerably to the love of beauty, delicacy and sweetness in the life of the Ashram.

A teacher should have respect for a child's mind and its conceptions of the world. He has to help the child to discover the world around him, experience the thrill of child-life—of course, not the cheap thrills.

The thrill and satisfaction that a young child of five must have derived from a Sanskrit play *Dhanur Pariksha* can be inferred from his prompt reply to the question, "What do you like most in the Ashram?"

"I like the school, play and drama," said he in a simple way nodding his head.

Another boy of the same age said quietly, "I like everything here." He has just joined (1972).

The former child had himself taken part in the play. Every year at the close of the session a play is performed in which all the children of the kindergarten are encouraged to take part whatever the language, whether French, English or Sanskrit. In the last session the little ones ranging from the age of two and a half to six, kept the audience spell-bound by their acting, gesture and posture and especially by their correct pronunciation of Sanskrit.

A three-year-old girl—a budding rose of joy, Gitanjali by name—learnt her

own part as well as those of others. Most of the children pick up the part of everybody, they practically know the whole drama, as one of the teachers told me. It was a never-to-be-forgotten thrill to hear Gitanjali repeating somebody's part of Saraswati in Sanskrit, in soft sweet melodious tones. She recited it when I urged her to give me the joy of hearing her again.

The secret of the children's success lies in their training from the nursery stage. As the language class continues throughout the year so also does the practice of singing, dancing and drama. The curriculum is such that all the activities go on throughout the year in rotation. It is left to the individual teacher to regulate his or her routine according to the tendencies and propensities of the students. This is up to 9.30 a.m. Between 9.30 and 10 a.m. is recess. After 10 they are free to choose their activities. Here also there is no fixed rule.

Be it noted here that a beginning is not made with A.B.C.D. Children have an immeasurable capacity to imitate. It is a God-given gift. They start speaking what they hear at home. Language is also taught through activities and educational games. The medium is French. Sanskrit is just another language.

This year (1972) the number of children is 58. There are nine teachers. Thus the quality of education does not suffer owing to over-crowded classes. Among the nine teachers, seven are female, two male. Only one is married.

All instructions are in French. Some learn it very soon. Most of them understand after a month or two but can't speak. During the first year they are kept in a nursery. Here the teaching is oral. The second year is called kindergarten No. I, the third year K II. Care is taken that by the third year they can read and write.

By the time they are ready to leave they more or less understand French, Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi and their mother tongue, besides English. Manob Tagore quickly picked up five languages. Aurofilio (aged five) born of Italian parents speaks both in French and Italian. He understands Tamil and Hindi. There are seven children from foreign countries in kindergarten. Thus begins child life in the Ashram.

(To be continued)

NARAYAN PRASAD

Students' Section

EYE EDUCATION

RELAX AND SEE

VISION is a process of mental interpretation of the retinal images. So in the act of seeing there is a close association between the mind and eyes. The eye without the mind will mechanically photograph the image but will not interpret it. The mind without the eye can imagine the images previously seen but will not tell you what is being photographed now. Correct seeing must be a perfectly co-ordinated action between mind and eye through Relax and See.

Relax and See is a quick effective process, of which most ophthalmologists are unaware. Hence their dogma of the incurability of errors of refraction such as myopia and hypermetropia continues. But now a number of doctors greatly appreciate the system of Relax and See and the time has come when its truth should be accepted by the medical profession for the welfare of humanity. How quickly the improvement in most of the cases of visual defects is achieved in the School for Perfect Eyesight at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram is unimaginable. Here we give a short description and illustrate the subject with a few cases.

The normal eye has three characteristics:

1. When the sight shifts from side to side of a letter, the letter appears to move in the opposite direction. This is swinging.
2. The letter regarded appears clearest. This is Central Fixation.
3. The white centre of a letter appears whiter. This is Imagination.

These three characteristics are called normal illusions of the normal eye which are reduced or are absent in the defective eye. So to improve the vision it is necessary to develop the normal illusions.

The defective eye loses the frequency of shifting and becomes more or less immobile. Therefore mobility is essential. This mobility is to be developed by blinking education, long and short swing, game of ball, table-tennis, walking and observing the side objects moving in the opposite direction. By the creation of mobility discomforts of the eye fade away and one feels relaxed.

The defective eye loses the faculty of central fixation. It tries to see a large area at a time. So to develop central fixation adopt the following exercise; take the Snellen eye testing chart and shift the sight from top to bottom and bottom to top of a letter and observe two things:

- a. When the sight shifts from top to bottom and bottom to top of the letter, the letter appears to move in the opposite direction.

b. The part of the letter regarded appears clearest.

The faculty of central fixation is also developed by reading fine print several times a day in good light and candle light. Myopic patients should avoid using glasses in reading and maintain relaxation by frequent palming and gentle blinking. By palming I mean: to close the eyes and cover them with the palms of the hands avoiding any pressure on the eyeballs; and to imagine something familiar and interesting.

To the defective eye the white centre of a letter does not appear whiter than the margin at varying distances. So there is loss of the imaginative faculty and the mind adds many other imperfections to the imperfect image received from the eye. So it is necessary to develop the faculty of interpretation of retinal images. This is achieved by imagination exercises:

- a. Take the chart in hand and observe that the white centre of the letter 'O' appears whiter at a distance where the sight is best. Gradually increase the distance. Or take two similar charts—one in hand and the other at five feet distance; look at the white centre on the near chart and then at the distant chart. Alternate.
- b. Shift the sight on the white lines in between the lines of fine print. When the sight shifts from side to side, the lines of print appear to move in the opposite direction.
- c. Take view-cards and develop the art of seeing as described in the book **MIND AND VISION**. The flatness of the picture will disappear and the three dimensional character of the picture will increase its beauty and improve the vision.

(To be continued)

DR. R. S. AGARWAL

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