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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.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXI

No. 10

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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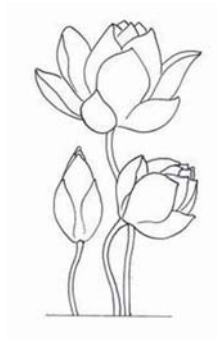
PERFECT THY MOTION

Perfect thy motion ever within me,
Master of mind.
Grey of the brain, flash of the lightning,
Brilliant and blind,
These thou linkest, the world to mould,
Writing the thought in a scroll of gold
Violet lined.

Tablet of brain thou hast made for thy writing,
Master divine.
Calmly thou writest or full of thy grandeur
Flushed as with wine.
Then with a laugh thou erasest the scroll,
Bringing another, like waves that roll
And sink supine.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 285)



TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN NATURE IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

PART ONE — SADHANA ON THE LEVEL OF THE MIND

SECTION ONE — THE MIND AND SADHANA

Chapter Five Thought and Knowledge

Thoughts Come From Outside

First of all, these thought-waves, thought-seeds or thought-forms or whatever they are, are of different values and come from different planes of consciousness. Even the same thought-substance can take higher or lower vibrations according to the plane of consciousness through which the thoughts come in (e.g., thinking mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscious mind) or the power of consciousness which catches them and pushes them into one man or another. Moreover there is a stuff of mind in each man and the incoming thought uses that for shaping itself or translating itself (transcribing we usually call it), but the stuff is finer or coarser, stronger or weaker etc. etc. in one mind than in another. Also there is a mind-energy actual or potential in each which differs and this mind-energy in its recipience of the thought can be luminous or obscure, sattvic, rajasic or tamasic with consequences that vary in each case.

*

There is no difficulty about explaining [*how a thought rejected by one person gets picked up by another*]. You are as naive and ignorant as a newborn lamb. That is the way things come, only one does not notice. Thoughts, ideas, happy inventions etc. etc. are always wandering about (in thought waves or otherwise) seeking a mind that may embody them. One mind takes, looks, rejects — another takes, looks, accepts. Two different minds catch the same thought-form or thought-wave, but the mental activities being different make different results out of them. Or it comes to one and he does nothing, then it walks off, crying “O this unready animal!” and goes to another who promptly annexes it and it settles into expression with a joyous bubble of inspiration, illumination or enthusiasm of original discovery or creation and the recipient cries proudly, “I, I have done this.” Ego, sir! ego! You are the recipient, the conditioning medium, if you like — nothing more.

*

That is the silliness of the mind. Why should it be impossible to fill up a vacancy?¹ It is easier for things to come into an empty space than into a full one. The error comes from thinking that your thoughts are your own and that you are their maker and if you don't create thoughts (i.e. think), there will be none. A little observation ought to show that you are not manufacturing your own thoughts, but rather thoughts occur in you. Thoughts are born, not made — like poets, according to the proverb. Of course, there is a sort of labour and effort when you try to produce or else to think on a certain subject, but that is a concentration for making thoughts come up, come in, come down, as the case may be, and fit themselves together. The idea that you are shaping the thoughts or fitting them together is an egoistic delusion. They are doing it themselves, or Nature is doing it for you, only under a certain compulsion; you have to beat her often in order to make her do it, and the beating is not always successful. But the mind or nature or mental energy — whatever you like to call it — does this in a certain way and carries on with a certain order of thoughts, haphazard intelligentialities (excuse the barbarism) or asinities, rigidly ordered or imperfectly ordered intellectualities, logical sequences and logical inconsequences, etc. etc. How the devil is an intuition to get in in the midst of that waltzing and colliding crowd? It does sometimes, — in some minds often intuitions do come in, — but immediately the ordinary thoughts surround it and eat it up alive, and then with some fragment of the murdered intuition shining through their non-intuitive stomachs they look up smiling at you and say, “I am an intuition, sir.” But they are only intellect, intelligence or ordinary thought with part of a dismembered and therefore misleading intuition inside them. Now in a vacant mind, vacant but not inert (that is important), intuitions have a chance of getting in alive and whole. But don't run away with the idea that all that comes into an empty mind, even a clear or luminous empty mind, will be intuitive. Anything, any blessed kind of idea, can come in. One has to be vigilant and examine the credentials of the visitor. In other words, the mental being must be there, silent but vigilant, impartial but discriminating. That is, however, when you are in search of truth. For poetry so much is not necessary. There it is only the poetic quality of the visitor that has to be scrutinised and that can be done after he has left his packet — by results.

*

What you perceive as suggestions or voices, are accepted and felt by people to be thoughts of their own mind. When one practises Yoga and observes the thoughts, one sees that they come from outside, from universal Nature, from the mental, vital or subtle physical worlds etc. The proper thing is then to stand back from these

1. *The correspondent said that his mind found it hard to believe that a vacancy in the mind could suddenly be filled with an intuition without one's thinking about it. — Ed.*

thoughts, voices or suggestions, to reject them or else control them, to make the mind free and quiet and open only to the divine light, force, knowledge and the presence of the Divine. Your mistake has been to allow free play to these thoughts, voices and suggestions instead of rejecting, silencing and controlling them. It is what you must now do. Aspire, get into contact with the Light and the true Force, reassert your will to reject these suggestions and voices. Do not take interest in these voices, keep the mind quiet.

*

All these thoughts and influences come really from outside, from universal Nature — they create formations in us or get habitual responses from the individual being. When they are rejected, they go back into the external universal Nature and if one becomes conscious, one can feel them coming from outside and trying to get a lodging inside again or reawaken the habitual response. One has to reject them persistently till no possibility of response remains any longer. This is hastened much if a certain inner calm, purity and silence can be established from which these things fall away without being able to touch it.

*

What you say is true. The power to open is there in your mind and vital and psychic being, but this recurrence of the external thoughts and feelings is making a strong obstruction and a persistent rejection is needed in order to get rid of it. There are some difficulties in the nature that fall away rapidly by the repeated touch of the inner Force, but those which are obstinately recurrent, especially in the physical field, need an equal persistence in the rejection before they will consent to fall away from the nature.

Control of One's Thoughts

To reject doubts means control of one's thoughts — very certainly so. But the control of one's thoughts is as necessary as the control of one's vital desires and passions or the control of the movements of one's body — for the Yoga, and not for the Yoga only. One cannot be a fully developed mental being even, if one has not a control of the thoughts, is not their observer, judge, master, — the mental Purusha, *manomaya puruṣa*, *śakṣī*, *anumantā*, *īśvara*. It is no more proper for the mental being to be the tennis ball of unruly and uncontrollable thoughts than to be a rudderless ship in the storm of the desires and passions or a slave of either the inertia or the impulses of the body. I know it is more difficult because man being

primarily a creature of mental Prakriti identifies himself with the movements of his mind and cannot at once dissociate himself and stand free from the swirl and eddies of the mind whirlpool. It is comparatively easy for him to put a control on his body, at least a certain part of its movements: it is less easy but still very possible after a struggle to put a mental control on his vital impulsions and desires; but to sit, like the Tantrik Yogi on the river, above the whirlpool of his thoughts is less facile. Nevertheless it can be done; all developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *svārājya*.

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it, as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the enviring Nature- Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. "Sit in meditation," he said, "but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw them away from you till your mind is capable of entire silence." I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think of either questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw a thought and then another thought coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.

I mention this only to emphasise that the possibilities of the mental being are not limited and that it can be the free Witness and Master in its own house. It is not to say that everybody can do it in the way I did and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for of course the later fullest development of this new untrammelled mental Power took time, many years); but a progressive freedom and mastery over one's mind is perfectly within the possibilities of anyone who has the faith and will to undertake it.

*

Assuredly, rejection means control of one's thoughts, and why should not one be master of one's own mind and thoughts and not only master of one's vital passions and bodily movements? If it is the right thing to control the body and not allow it to make a stupid, wrong or injurious movement, if it is the right thing to reject from the vital an ignorant passion or low desire, it must be equally the right thing to reject from the mind a thought that ought not to be there or that for good reasons one does not want to be there. As for possibility, I suppose when a thought that is manifestly stupid or false presents itself to the mind one can and usually does reject and throw it out and bid it not recur again. If one can do that with a given thought, it follows that one can do it with any thoughts that need for any reason to be excluded. If a scientist goes into his laboratory to work out a problem, he shuts out from his mind for the time being all thoughts of his wife, his family or his financial affairs, and if they come he repels them and says, "This is not your time." If he has resolved to carry out a line of investigation to the end or a method of invention and, if doubts assail him, he will certainly throw them aside and say, "I mean to see this through to the end and till I have reached the end, I have no intention of listening to you." At every step a man of any mental calibre has to exercise some power over his mind, otherwise he would be as much in a state of restless mental confusion or of mechanical incoherence as one who had no control over his impulses and desires.

*

To do anything by mental control is always difficult, when what is attempted runs contrary to the trend of human nature or of the personal nature. A strong will patiently and perseveringly turned towards its object can effect a change, but usually it takes a long time and the success at the beginning may be only partial and chequered by many failures.

To turn all actions automatically into worship cannot be done by thought control only; there must be a strong aspiration in the heart which will bring about some realisation or feeling of the presence of the One to whom worship is offered. The bhakta does not rely on his own effort alone, but on the grace and power of the Divine whom he adores.

*

What do you mean by control of the mind? Control of the thoughts or control of the passions and the sense impulses? The latter can be controlled by the mind (not abolished), if the will in the mind is strong enough. But this mental control is not Yoga.

Yogic control can come in one of two ways or by their combination. (1) To separate the witness Soul in you from the movements of the mental, vital and physical

Prakriti to which these things belong, learn to look upon them and in the end to feel them as not yourself, not a part of the inner or true being but occurring on the surface, and to experience the inner being as the Purusha eternally calm, silent and immovable. This separation once done, learn by *abhyāsa* to give the effective command of the Purusha to the movements of the Prakriti to cease — refusing the sanction to all that you wish to eliminate. The process is long and laborious and the final perfection can only come by resolute and persevering practice. (2) To open yourself to the Divine Power and give up all into its hands, yourself only rejecting and refusing sanction to all that you feel to be false and contrary to truth and purity in you.

This is as an answer to your difficulty, but I cannot direct you or give you any Sadhana, which I give only to those who are called from within to my way of Yoga and not for any limited object like the one you have in view.

*

It is not so easy to do mental work and do sadhana at the same time, for it is with the mind that the sadhana is done. If one gets back from the mind as well as the body and lives in the inner Purusha consciousness, then it is possible.

*

Detach yourself from it [*the habitual movement of the mind*] — make your mind external to you, something that you can observe as you observe things occurring in the street. So long as you do not do that, it is difficult to be the mind's master.

*

The control over the thoughts and the power of seeing the image of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the head are a very good beginning. The heat in the head is not fever, but the result of the action of the Force in the mental centres working to overcome the mental resistance which there always is in the human mind — heaviness sometimes comes as a result of the pressure of the Force — it passes away of itself usually when the mind receives freely the Force.

Thoughts and Words

This is a wrong psychology. Thoughts is quite possible without words. Children have thoughts, animals too — thoughts can take another form than words. Thought perceptions come first — language comes to express the perceptions and itself leads to fresh thoughts.

*

They [*ideas in the universal Mind*] take word form in the mind when they enter into it — unless they come from beings, not as mere idea-forces.

The Idea and What Lies Behind It

There is a power in the idea — a force of which the idea is a shape. Again, behind the idea and force and word there is what is called the spirit, — a consciousness which generates the force.

*

The idea is not enough. It gives only a half-light — you must get to all the Truth that lies behind the idea and the object together. Being, consciousness, force, — that is the triple secret.

Thought and Knowledge

Thought is not the giver of Knowledge but the “mediator” between the Inconscient and the Superconscient. It compels the world born from the Inconscient to reach for a Knowledge other than the instinctive vital or merely empirical, for the Knowledge that itself exceeds thought; it calls for that superconscient Knowledge and prepares the consciousness here to receive it. It rises itself into the higher realms and even in disappearing into the supramental and Ananda levels is transformed into something that will bring down their powers into the silent Self which its cessation leaves behind it.

Knowledge and Ignorance

Knowledge is always better than ignorance. It makes things possible hereafter if not at the moment, while ignorance actively obstructs and misleads.

*

Who comes into the path of Yoga with full knowledge or even any knowledge? All are ignorant, it is only by Yoga itself that they get the knowledge.

*

Neither knowledge nor anything else is constant at first — and even when it is there one cannot expect it to be always active. That comes afterwards.

*

What is to be left out [*in expressing one's ideas*] is the ego. Limitation of knowledge will necessarily be there so long as there is not the fullest wideness from above; that does not matter.

*

Most people who have not knowledge are apt to be opinionated — they have their ideas and don't want them to be changed or their fixity disturbed.

Knowledge and the Divine Consciousness

Mental knowledge is of little use except sometimes as an introduction pointing towards the real knowledge which comes from a direct consciousness of things.

*

All consciousness comes from the one consciousness — knowledge is one aspect of the divine consciousness.

*

One must be conscious of all one's states and movements and the causes and influences that bring them about and conscious too of the Divine — the nearness, presence, power, peace, light, knowledge, love, Ananda of the Divine.

Mental Knowledge and Knowledge from Above

The knowledge of the mind and vital plane is no knowledge. Only from above can the true knowledge come.

*

No, these contacts with the violent vital forces do not bring knowledge — they rather stand in the way of true knowledge growing. The true knowledge comes

from above, not from below. The knowledge from above is divine, the knowledge from below is not divine, it is a confusion full of darkness and disturbance. When the knowledge from above comes, then there is light and you will then be able to see what is the true vital movement and the real harmony of the mind, vital and body. Do not allow these stormy conditions to take hold of you.

*

Is getting knowledge from above and getting it by the mind in its own capacity the same thing? If the mind is capable, then there is no need of knowledge from above, it can do the getting of knowledge by its own greatness.

*

The mind in its higher part is aware of being one with the Divine, in all ways, in all things — having that supreme knowledge, it is not disturbed by its own ignorance and impotence in its lower instrumental parts; it looks on all that with a smile and remains happy and luminous with the light of the supreme knowledge.

The consciousness of union with the Divine is for the spiritual seeker the supreme knowledge.

Knowledge and Mental Questions

To answer your question [*about how the divine consciousness acts in life*] I would have to speak in the terms of a consciousness to which the mind has no key and at the same time try to explain its relations to the lower consciousness in which things are now happening. What is the use of doing this? The mind will either understand nothing or misunderstand or think it has understood when really it has understood nothing.

Or I would have to make up a mental answer to the question which would not be the real thing, but just something to keep the questioning mind quiet.

The true way to enter into these things is to still the mind and open to the consciousness from which things are done. Then you would first have a direct experience of the way the divine consciousness acts on different planes and secondly a light of knowledge about the experience. This is the only true way — all the rest is only words and sterile mental logic.

*

A thousand questions can be asked about anything whatsoever, but to answer would require a volume, and even then the mind would understand nothing. It is only by a growth in the consciousness itself that you can get some direct perception of these things. But for that the mind must be quiet and a direct feeling and intuition take its place.

*

So long as the outer mind is not quiet, it is impossible for intuition to develop. So if you want to go on asking intellectual questions about what is beyond the intellect until the intuition develops in spite of this activity, you will have to go on for ever.

*

When you get the true intuitive plane, there will be no need for instructions or questions as to how to do sadhana. The sadhana will do itself under the light of the intuition.

*

Your mind is too active. If it were more quiet and less questioning and argumentative and restlessly wanting to find devices it seems to me that there would be more chance of knowledge coming down and of intuitive, non-intellectual consciousness developing within you.

*

Out of one thousand mental questions and answers there are only one or two here and there that are really of any dynamic assistance — while a single inner response or a little growth of consciousness will do what those thousand questions and answers could not do. The Yoga does not proceed by *upadeśa* but by inner influence. To state your condition, experiences etc. and open to the help is far more important than question-asking — especially the questions about why and how which your physical mind so persistently puts.

*

It is the physical mind that raises all these questions and cannot understand or give the right answer. The real knowledge and understanding can only come if you stop questioning with the small physical mind and allow a deeper and wider consciousness which is there within you to come out and grow. You would then get automatically

the true answer and the true guidance. Your mistake is to attach so much importance to the external mind and its ideas and perceptions instead of concentrating on the growth of the inner consciousness.

*

Such [*mental*] questions should not be allowed to stop the flow [*of higher knowledge*]. Afterwards one can consider them and get the answer. The knowledge that comes is not necessarily complete or perfect in expression; but it must be allowed to come freely and amplifications or corrections can be made afterwards.

Understanding and the Higher Light

Get back to the true *feeling* of the Force and Peace — the understanding will grow with the growth of that feeling and experience. For with the Force and Peace comes always something of the Light and it is the Light illuminating the mind that brings the understanding. So long as you try to understand with the unilluminated mind, mistakes and non-understanding are inevitable.

*

Yes, that is the point. The ordinary mind governed by the vital desires and its own mental formations cannot understand — it must fall quiet and allow the Peace and Force to work so as to bring another consciousness with the true Light in it. When that is done, these questionings and their reactions will have no place.

*

Yes, it is that [*faith that the Mother will enlighten one's mind*] that is the real necessity. It is not possible for the mind to understand fully and rightly till it is filled with the higher Light; but it can feel and believe in the Divine and that the way of the Divine is sure, and this faith itself will bring the first true understanding.

*

What you say is quite true. No personal effort can get these things done; that is why we tell you always to keep yourself quiet and let the peace and the force work. As for understanding, it is your physical mind that wants to understand, but the physical mind is incapable of understanding these things by itself — for it has no knowledge of them and no means of knowledge. Its standards also are quite different from the

standards of the true knowledge. All the physical mind can do is to be quiet and allow the light to come into it, accepting it, not interposing its own ideas — then it will progressively get the knowledge. It can't get it in this way; it must surrender.

*

If one has faith and openness, that is enough [*to get the understanding one needs to practise the Yoga*]. Besides there are two kinds of understanding — understanding by the intellect and understanding in the consciousness. It is good to have the former if it is accurate, but it is not indispensable. Understanding by the consciousness comes if there is faith and openness, though it may come only gradually and through steps of experience. But I have seen people without education or intellectuality understand in this way perfectly well the course of the Yoga in themselves, while intellectual men make big mistakes — e.g. take a neutral mental quietude for the spiritual peace and refuse to come out of it in order to go farther.

Knowledge and the Psychic

It is not a mental knowledge that is necessary, but a psychic perception or a direct perception in the consciousness. A mental knowledge can always be blinded by the tricks of the vital.

*

The one thing always is to let the Peace and Power work and not allow the mind to seek after things and get disturbed. All the values of the mind are constructions of ignorance — it is only when your psychic being comes forward that you have the true knowledge — for your psychic being knows.

Knowledge and Mental Silence

That [*incessant activity*] is always the difficulty with the mind. It must learn to be silent and let the knowledge come without trying to catch hold of it for its own play.

*

The turmoil of mental (intellectual) activity has also to be silenced like the vital activity of desire in order that the calm and peace may be complete. Knowledge has to come but from above. In this calm the ordinary mental activities like the ordinary

vital activities become surface movements with which the silent inner self is not connected. It is the liberation necessary in order that the true knowledge and the true life activity may replace or transform the activities of the Ignorance.

*

The activity of mind is necessary so long as a higher activity cannot be reached; but if the spiritual consciousness becomes active with its direct power of perception, the mind must become more and more content and give place to spiritual perception, psychic intimations and discrimination, intuitions, a deeper knowledge from within, a higher knowledge from above.

*

The thinking mind has to learn how to be entirely silent. It is only then that true knowledge can come.

*

Of course [*a silent mind is the result of Yoga*]; the ordinary mind is never silent.

*

No, certainly not [*thinkers and philosophers do not have a silent mind*]. It is the active mind they have; only, of course, they concentrate, so the common incoherent mentalising stops and the thoughts that rise or enter and shape themselves are coherently restricted to the subject or activity in hand. But that is quite a different matter from the whole mind falling silent.

*

Ordinary human minds, Europeans especially, are accustomed to regard thought as indispensable and as the highest thing — so they are alarmed at silence. X when he was here asked for Yoga. I told him how to make his mind silent and it became silent. He immediately got frightened and said, “I am becoming a fool, I can’t think”, — so I took what I had given away from him. That is how the average mind regards silence.

*

Good; cessation of thought and other vibrations is the climax of the inner silence. When once one has got that, it is easier for the true knowledge to come from above in place of the mental thought.

*

It [*knowledge*] comes through the mind, so the mind can always modify its expression unless it is entirely and absolutely still.

*

When the personal mind is still, whatever mental action is needed is taken up and done by the Force itself which does all the necessary thinking and progressively transforms it by bringing down into it a higher and higher plane of perception and knowledge.

*

It is in the silence of the mind that the strongest and freest action can come, e.g. the writing of a book, poetry, inspired speech etc. When the mind is active it interferes with the inspiration, puts in its own small ideas which get mixed up with the inspiration or starts something from a lower level or simply stops the inspiration altogether by bubbling up with all sorts of mere mental suggestions. So also intuitions or action etc. can come more easily when the ordinary inferior movement of the mind is not there. It is also in the silence of the mind that it is easiest for knowledge to come from within or above, from the psychic or from the higher consciousness.

Knowledge, Experience and Realisation

Knowledge by thinking process would not be spiritual knowledge. True knowledge comes by spiritual realisation and experience. There are such realisations and experiences.

*

I was speaking of your experiences of the higher consciousness, of your seeing the Mother in all things — these are what are called spiritual realisations, spiritual knowledge. Realisations are the essence of knowledge — thoughts about them, expression of them in words are a lesser knowledge and if the thoughts are merely mental without experience or realisation, they are not regarded as *jñāna* in the spiritual sense at all.

*

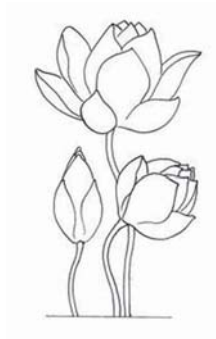
It [*knowledge gained in Divine realisation*] is the conscious experience of the Truth, seen, felt, lived within and it is also a spiritual perception (more direct and concrete than the intellectual) of the true significance of things which may express itself in thought and speech, but is independent of them in itself.

*

Yes, it happens like that. A touch of realisation is enough to set the higher mind knowledge or the illumined mind knowledge flowing.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga – IV*, CWSA, Vol. 31, pp. 40-56)



THE CENTURY OF LIFE

(The Nitishataka of Bhartrihari freely rendered into English verse)

(Continued from the issue of September 2018)

ON FIRMNESS

Gods

Cease never from the work thou hast begun
Till thou accomplish; such the great gods be,
Nor paused for gems unknown beneath the sun,
Nor feared for the huge poisons of the sea,
Then only ceased when nectar's self was won.

The Man of High Action

Happiness is nothing, sorrow nothing. He
Recks not of these whom his clear thoughts impel
To action, whether little and miserably
He fare on roots or softly dine and well,
Whether bare ground receive his sleep or bed
With smoothest pillows ease his pensive head,
Whether in rags or heavenly robes he dwell.

Ornaments

What is an ornament? Courtesy in high place,
Speech temperate in the hero, innocence
In high philosophers, and wrathlessness
In hermits, and in riches noble expense.
Sincerity and honest meaning plain
Save outward holiness, mercy the strong
Adorns and modesty most learned men;
One grace to every station can belong.
Cause of all other gems, of all is blent
Virtue, the universal ornament.

The Immutable Courage

If men praise thee, O man, 'tis well; nor ill,
 If they condemn. Let fortune curst or boon
 Enter thy doors or leave them as she will.
 Though death expect thee ere yon sinking moon
 Vanish or wait till unborn stars give light,
 The firm high soul remains immutable,
 Nor by one step will deviate from the right.

The Ball

Lo, as a ball that, by the player's palm
 Smit downward, falls but to again rebound,
 So the high virtuous man hurled to the ground
 Bends not to fortune long his spirit calm.

Work and Idleness

Their bitterest enemy in their bodies pent
 Men cherish, idleness. Be in thy breast
 The tireless gust of work thy mighty guest,
 Man's ceaseless helper, whose great aid once lent
 Thy strength shall fail not, nor thy head be bent.

The Self-Reliance of the Wise

The tree once pruned shall seek again the skies,
 The moon in heaven waning wax once more:
 Wise men grieve not nor vex their soul with sighs
 Though the world tread them down with savage roar;
 Knowing their strength, they husband it to rise.

ON FATE

Fate Masters the Gods

Brihuspathy¹ his path of vantage shows,
 The red disastrous thunder leaves his hand
 Obedient, the high Gods in burning rows
 His battled armies make, high heaven's his fort,
 Iravath swings his huge trunk for his sport,
 The Almighty's guardian favours over him stand; —
 That Indra with these strengths, this lordship proud
 Is broken by his foes in battle loud.
 Come then, bow down to Fate. Alas, the vain
 Heroisms, virtues, toils of glorious man!

A Parable of Fate

A serpent in a basket crushed despaired,
 His organs all with hunger weak and worn,
 While patiently at night the mouse prepared
 A hole in that self basket. Ere the morn
 By his own industry, such Nature's law,
 The patient labourer fills the serpent's maw.
 He with that food replenished, by the way
 The mouse had made, escaped. O world, behold
 The mighty master of thy sad decay
 And fortunate rising, Fate, the godhead old.

Fate and Freewill

“The actions of our former life control
 This life's sweet fruit or bitter; even the high
 Intellect follows where these point its eye.”
 All this is true, — O yet, be wise of soul,
 Think ere thou act, thou who wouldst reach the goal.

1. Brihuspathy is counsellor to Indra, the King of Heaven, and spiritual guide of the Gods. Iravath is Indra's elephant.

Ill Luck

A bald man, goes the story, when the noon
 Beat his plagued brows into a fiery swoon,
 Desiring dimness and cool place was led
 By subtle Fate into a high palm's shade.
 There where he shelter hoped, a giant fruit
 Crashed on his pate and broke with horrid bruit.
 Wherever the unfortunate hides his head,
 Grief and disaster in his footprints tread.

Fate Masters All

I saw the brilliant moon eclipsed, the sun
 Balked darkly of his radiant pilgrimage,
 And halter-bound the forest's mighty one,
 The iron-coiled huge python in a cage;
 Then saw the wise skilled brain a pauper, and said
 "Fate only is strong whose hand on all is laid."

The Follies of Fate

Sometimes the gods build up a very man
 Whom genius, virtue, glory crowd to bless,
 And Earth with him adorned grows measureless.
 Then if death early spoil that noble plan,
 Ah, blind stupidity of Fate that throws
 From her brow the jewel, from her breast the rose!

The Script of Fate

When on the desert-bramble's boughs you find
 Leafage nor flower, blame not the bounteous Spring!
 Is it the sun's fault if the owlet blind
 Sees not by day so radiant-bright a thing?
 Though down the rainlark's throat no sweet drops flow,
 Yet for his falling showers the high cloud praise.
 What Fate has written in power upon the brow,
 Where is the hand so mighty it shall raise?

ON KARMA²

Action be Man's God

Whom shall men worship? The high Gods? But they
 Suffer fate's masteries, enjoy and rue.
 Whom shall men worship? Fate's stern godhead? Nay,
 Fate is no godhead. Many fruits or few
 Their actions bring to men, — that settled price
 She but deals out, a steward dumb, precise.
 Let action be man's God, o'er whom even Fate
 Can rule not, nor his puissance abrogate.

The Might of Works

Bow ye to Karma who with puissant hand
 Like a vast potter all the universe planned,
 Shut the Creator in and bade him work
 In the dim-glinting womb and luminous murk;
 By whom impelled high Vishnu hurled to earth
 Travels his tenfold depths and whorls of birth;
 Who leading mighty Rudra by the hand
 Compels to wander strange from land to land, —
 A vagrant begging with a skull for bowl
 And suppliant palms, who is yet the world's high Soul.
 Lo, through the skies for ever this great Sun
 Wheels circling round and round by Karma spun.

Karma

It is not beauty's charm nor lineage high,
 It is not virtue, wisdom, industry,
 Service, nor careful arduous toil that can
 Bring forth the fruits of his desire to man;

2. There is a distinction, not always strictly observed, between Fate and Karma. Karma is the principle of Action in the universe with its stream of cause and infallible effect, and for man the sum of his past actions whose results reveal themselves not at once, but in the dispensation of Time, partly in this life, mostly in lives to come. Fate seems a more mysterious power imposing itself on men, despite all their will and endeavour, from outside them and above — *daivam*, a power from the Gods.

Old merit mind's strong asceticism had stored
 Returns to him with blessing or a sword,
 His own past deeds that flower soon or late
 Each in its season on the tree of Fate.

Protection from behind the Veil

Safe is the man good deeds forgotten claim,
 In pathless deserts or in dangerous war
 Or by armed foes enringed; sea and fierce flame
 May threaten, death's door waiting swing ajar;
 Slumbering or careless though his foemen find,
 Yea, though they seize him, though they smite or bind,
 On ocean wild or on the cliff's edge sheer
 His deeds walk by his side and guard from fear;
 Through death and birth they bore him and are here.

The Strength of Simple Goodness

Toiler ascetic, who with passionate breath
 Swellest huge holinesses, — vain thy faith!
 Good act adore, the simple goddess plain,
 Who gives the fruit thou seekest with such pain.
 Her touch can turn the lewd man into a saint,
 Inimitably her quiet magic lent
 Change fools to sages and hidden mysteries show
 Beyond eye's reach or brain's attempt to know,
 Fierce enemies become friends and poisons ill
 Transform in a moment to nectar at her will.

Foresight and Violence

Good be the act or faulty, its result
 The wise man painfully forecasting first
 Then does; who in mere heedless force exult,
 Passionate and violent, taste a fruit accursed.
 The Fury keeps till death her baleful course
 And blights their life, tormenting with remorse.

Misuse of Life

This noble earth, this place for glorious deeds
 The ill-starred man who reaching nowise heeds,
 Nor turns his soul to energy austere,
 With little things content or idlesse drear, —
 He is like one who gets an emerald pot
 To bake him oil-cakes on a fire made hot
 With scented woods, or who with golden share
 For sorry birthwort ploughs a fertile fair
 Sweet soil, or cuts rich camphor piece by piece
 To make a hedge for fennel. Not for this
 In the high human form he walks great earth
 After much labour getting goodliest birth.

Fixed Fate

Dive if thou wilt into the huge deep sea,
 The inaccessible far mountains climb,
 Vanquish thy foes in battle fierily,
 All arts and every science, prose and rhyme,
 Tillage and trade in one mind bring to dwell, —
 Yea, rise to highest effort, ways invent
 And like a bird the skies immeasurable
 Voyage; all this thou mayst, but not compel
 What was not to be, nor what was prevent.

Flowers from a Hidden Root

With store of noble deeds who here arrives,
 Finds on this earth his well-earned Paradise.
 The lonely forest grows his kingly town
 Of splendour, every man has friendly eyes
 Seeing him, or the wide earth for his crown
 Is mined with gems and with rich plenty thrives.
 This high fate is his meed of former lives.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 347-57)

‘THY SPLENDOUR WANTS TO RADIATE’

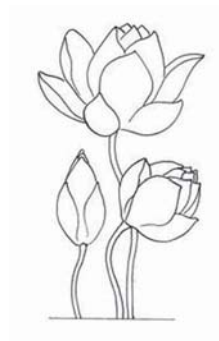
June 16, 1914

Like a sun Thy splendour descends upon the earth and Thy rays will illumine the world. All those elements which are pure enough, plastic enough, sufficiently receptive to manifest the very splendour of the central fire-nucleus are grouping themselves together. This grouping is not arbitrary and does not depend on the will or aspiration of one element or another, it depends on what it is, it is independent of any individual decision. Thy splendour wants to radiate; what is capable of manifesting it manifests it, and these elements gather together to reconstitute as perfectly as possible in this world of division the divine Centre which has to be manifested.

In the wonder of this contemplation all the cells of the being exult; and, seeing That which Is, the integral substance passes into an ecstasy. How can this substance be now distinguished from Thyself? It is Thou — completely, entirely, intensely — in a perfect identification, Thou.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 175)



LETTERS TO A YOUNG SADHAK

[*This Series is organised broadly by subject into thirteen parts — the form in which it was originally published. The replies here were written between 1933 and 1949 — most of them between 1933 and 1935.*]

I

I hope and believe Your work does not depend upon human beings.

No, it does not depend at all upon human beings. What has to be done will be done despite all possible resistances.

*

Is there no means of uniting my will with Yours? Perhaps You have no special will, for You want nothing.

I know perfectly well what I want or rather what the divine Will is, and it is that which will triumph in time.

*

What we want to bring to the earth can hardly be called a *revolution*, although it will be the most marvellous change ever seen; in any case this cannot be compared at all with the bloody revolutions which quite uselessly tear up countries without bringing any great change after them, because they leave men as false, as ignorant, as egoistic as before.

*

I believe a day will come when the Divine will be seen quite naturally as one sees earthly things and then there will be no need to exclaim: “The Divine is everywhere” — for this will be a normal experience.

If the realisation were to be limited to this, it would hardly be worth much. It is an integral transformation of terrestrial life which is anticipated.

*

Beloved Mother, every moment I feel a great transformation taking place in me. Isn't this true?

It is quite true. But it seems to me that even the outer forms, the appearances are changing more than you say. Only, this is not very easily seen because it happens normally, in accordance with the law of the truth of things, and not arbitrarily through a mental decision.

*

Certainly the Divine Grace is always at work, it is the material world and the men living there that do not want it!

*

What does the Divine want of me?

He wants that you first find yourself; that with your true being, your psychic being, you master and govern the lower being, and then you will quite naturally take your proper place in the great Divine Work.

*

Where is my true being?

Farther within or higher above, on the other side of the emotions, beyond the mind.

*

I feel indignant, Mother, for I cannot find my "self", as soon as I try to do so, I find nothing but this body, which is like a lair of banal thoughts and lawless desires.

One must persist without getting discouraged, and first of all refuse to recognise the body as one's "self". Indeed, what would it be without the feelings and thoughts which animate it? An inert, lifeless mass.

*

Mother, what is it that will help me always remember that I am living a spiritual life?

The awareness of the Divine Presence in all things and always.

*

You have said in your Conversations that to prepare oneself for the Yoga one must first of all be conscious. To be conscious of the Divine Presence in us is our goal; I don't see how I can be conscious from the beginning.

I have not said "conscious of the Divine Presence", I have said "conscious"; that means one does not live in total ignorance of what happens within oneself.

*

I cannot accept all that happens with a calm heart.

This is, however, indispensable for yoga; and he who has so great an aim as to be united with the Divine and to manifest Him, how can he be affected by all the futilities and foolishnesses of life?

*

There are people who say one must unite closely with the outer nature to be able to taste the joy which the manifested world so effectively conceals.

I don't think this is true; union with the outer nature brings more certainly sorrow than joy!

*

If you were a man of the world as you say, you would not be here; you would be in the world. These are certain elements in the being which remain attached to their old activities and refuse to change. They will have to yield and be transformed one day or another.

*

I ask You once again, Mother, what is it that divides my being?

The conflict is between that which aspires towards consciousness, the “sattwic” part of the being, and that which lets itself be invaded and governed by the inconscience, the “tamasic” part of the being, between that which pushes upwards and that which pulls downwards and therefore is subject to all outer influences.

*

Mother, Your world may hurt me, but it cannot give me any enjoyment; I myself too do not want any.

It is good to be above all enjoyments the world can give, but why accept to be hurt by it?

*

I don't like this life without any attachments.

If truly you are no longer attached to anything, it is a great yogic realisation and it would be wrong of you to complain about it.

*

The whole world is against me and I am in despair.

Why do you want to think the whole world is against you? This is childish.

*

My physical mind is not yet convinced that human life is capable of overcoming all suffering and even death.

It may be that human life is indeed incapable of it; but for the divine life nothing is impossible.

*

Is it strange that one should become disgusted with this world? The repetition of the same round — that is death itself.

This is one way of seeing things; but there is another in which one finds that no two things, no two moments are exactly alike in the world and that everything is in perpetual change.

*

I do not understand a phrase in Your Prayers: “and that all are equal — infinitesimal grains of dust or identical stars — before Eternity”.

All the stars (spiritually speaking) are the same. I mean that one may call human beings grains of dust if one likes, or compare them to the stars; in either case they are all alike in size and worth before Eternity.

II

Beloved Mother, guide my steps, illumine my mind, and do not leave, I pray, any distance between You and me.

I too do not want any distance between us. But the relation must be a true one, that is, based on union in the divine consciousness.

*

Open your heart yet wider, yet better, and the distance will disappear.

*

This prison that separates me from You and from the Divine must be broken. O Mother, I don't know what I ought to do.

It is in a calm and persevering will that this can be accomplished.

*

May my whole being be only that love which wants to give itself, and which leads me to You.

Keep this aspiration and you are sure of victory; you will love me one day with a love which fills you with strength and with joy.

*

My Mother, with all my will and all my effort I want to realise that love which You have foreseen in your divine vision.

I shall always be with you in your endeavour.

*

My dear Mother, I do not say that I love You and belong to You, I must prove it in my actions; without that these would be worthless words behind which a man seeks shelter and protection. But even so, I am always Your child.

That's good. You are indeed always my child and I expect you to become even more a good child who will be able to tell me in all sincerity and truth: "I love You and I am Yours for all eternity."

*

O Mother, take me with You; I shall seat You for ever in my heart; I could not bear to lose You.

There is no question of losing me. We carry in ourselves an eternal consciousness and it is of this that one must become aware.

*

Whatever the reason may be, as soon as my consciousness loses You I become joyless and without energy.

At no moment do I forget you. Don't you rather allow too many other influences to come between you and me?

*

Mother, why is it so difficult to feel Your Presence constantly near me? In the depths of my heart I know well that without You there is no meaning in life for me; yet my mind flits hither and thither as soon as it finds the slightest occasion.

It is precisely because of this that you lose the feeling of the Presence.

*

I am always with you, and to become conscious of the inner Presence is one of the most important points of the sadhana. Ask X, he will tell you that the Presence is not a matter of faith or of mental imagination, it is a fact, absolutely concrete and as real and tangible to the consciousness as the most material phenomenon.

*

My beloved Mother, if only I could convince my ignorant being that it is possible to find You in the centre of my heart.

It is not a question of *convincing* your heart, you must get the *experience* of this presence and then you will become aware that in its depths your heart has always been conscious of this presence.

*

Remove from me all obscurity which blinds me, and be always with me.

I am in every thought, every aspiration which you turn towards me; for if you were not always present in my consciousness you would not be able to think of me. So you may be sure of my presence. I add my blessings.

*

Beloved Mother, how shall I find the source of that Love which will make me feel that the divine Presence is always and everywhere?

You must find the Divine first, whether in yourself by interiorisation and concentration, or in Sri Aurobindo and me through love and self-giving. Once you have found the Divine you will naturally see Him in all things and everywhere.

*

There are two ways of uniting with the Divine. One is to concentrate in the heart and go deep enough to find there His Presence; the other is to fling oneself in His arms, to nestle there as a child nestles in its mother's arms, with a *complete surrender*; and of the two the latter seems to me the easier.

*

My darling Mother, if the Divine shows Himself to me in exchange for my love for Him and the giving of my soul, then it is a very easy thing for me.

Not only of the soul, but of the whole being, without reserve.

*

Who is there to hold me back far from You?

You yourself.

It is quite incorrect that I wish to remain far from you; but to be near me you must climb up close beside me, and not expect me to come down so far.

*

My beloved Mother, one day You wrote to me that I must climb to the plane where You are, to be able to have You intimately, and that I must not expect You to come down here. But Mother, You are so great and remain so high up that it seems to me almost impossible to climb up there. There is a world of difference between our two planes. I dare not dream of the moment I shall be at your side; You will always be higher, and I shall aspire to You; I shall follow You from plane to plane, but You will be always far from me. This picture does not appear bad to me, because I know there is a great joy in seeking; but it is true that my heart will always be thirsty.

From a certain point of view what you say is true; but there is also a sort of reversal of consciousness in which it comes out of its state of blind and falsifying ignorance and enters into a state of truth, and when that reversal, that conversion takes place, you will feel yourself always close to me.

*

My beloved Mother, is it not possible to meet You on some other plane than the physical? I don't mean by leaving the body; even when in the body, is it not possible to meet on some other higher plane?

Certainly, this is quite possible. But one must awaken to the consciousness of these planes.

*

Mother, I want simply to leave the body; it is the body which separates me from You.

To say that it is your body which separates you from me is sheer stupidity. It seems to me that actually it is just the opposite, for without the possibility of seeing me daily, what contact will you have with me in the present state of your consciousness? Are you capable of feeling me, experiencing concretely my presence, even when

your physical eyes do not see me? I don't think so, for if it were so, you would not complain of separation, you would know, on the contrary, that there is no separation and that in the reality of your being we are always united.

To think that if you leave your body you will come closer to me is a big mistake; for the vital being remains what it is, whether the body be alive or dead, and if the vital being is, during one's life, incapable of feeling the nearness, the deep intimacy, how can one reasonably hope it will suddenly be able to do so just because it has left the body? It is ignorant childishness.

And that other idea that if the body is changed the next one will necessarily be better, is also a mistake. It is only when one has profited fully and *to the utmost* by the opportunity for progress which life in a physical body represents, that one may hope to be reborn in a higher organism. All defection, on the contrary, naturally brings in a diminution of being.

Only the resolution to face courageously, in the present existence, all the difficulties, and to overcome them, is the sure means of attaining the union you desire.

*

My one hope is to progress as much as I can, so that my next birth may not be useless like this one.

This is all nonsense; we have not to busy ourselves with the next life, but with this one which offers us, *till our very last breath*, all its possibilities. To put off for the next birth what one can do in this life is like putting off for tomorrow what one can do this very day; it is laziness. It is only with death that the possibility of integral realisation ceases; so long as one is alive, nothing is impossible.

*

What cannot be acquired or conquered during life can certainly not be done after death. It is the physical life which is the true field for progress and realisation.

*

Beloved Mother, I must either be transformed or cease to be.

It is impossible *to cease to be*; nothing that belongs to the manifested universe can go out of it except through the door of spiritual liberation, that is, *transformation*.

III

I often ask myself if there is a truth behind this desire to come close to You.

Yes, there is the Truth of perfect union with the Divine in an identity of consciousness and will.

*

My sweet Mother, do You say that I ought to overcome this desire to come to You physically?

I have never said anything of the kind. But you must prepare yourself, purify yourself within, so that this approach may be useful and profitable.

*

If you say I am there for you *alone*, obviously it is egoistic and false; but if you think I am there for all my children, that I carry them in my heart, that I want to lead them to the Divine and that I am grieved when they move away from Him, — then this is quite true.

*

I have not the least intention of keeping you away from me; I wanted only to remind you that you are not alone in the Ashram and that I have to divide my time among all those who have need of me.

*

If you are physically far from me and think of me all the time, you will surely be nearer to me than if you were seated near me but thinking about other things.

*

Mother, how can I feel You concretely near me, even when my body is far from You?

By concentrating your thought.

*

Beloved Mother, there are twenty-four hours in a day, but I can't remain at Your feet for more than a few seconds; how can I live?

Go within into yourself, find your psychic being and you will find me at the same time, living in you, life of your life, ever present and ever near, quite concretely and tangibly.

*

Remain very quiet, open your mind and your heart to Sri Aurobindo's influence and mine, withdraw deep into an inner silence (which may be had in all circumstances), call me from the depths of this silence and you will see me standing there in the centre of your being.

*

Because I stopped the pranam for two days, you should not think that I was not with you. Wherever you work, physically near or far, *I am always with you in your work and in your consciousness.* You ought to know that.

*

Life will no longer have any attraction for me if I do not feel that You are with me.

But I am always with you.

*

Do not leave my heart empty, Mother.

I am always in your heart.

*

The psychic being is constantly and invariably in contact with the Divine and never loses this contact.

*

The Divine is constantly present in the psychic being and the latter is quite conscious of this.

*

The psychic being is asleep in me.

The psychic being is not asleep. It is the connection with it which is not well established because the mind makes too much noise and the vital is too restless.

*

Mother, if the psychic always feels the Divine Presence, why does the human being cry and lament the lack of this Presence?

I have already told you that it is because the contact between the outer consciousness and the psychic consciousness is not well established. He in whom this contact is well established is always happy.

*

The suffering we experience proves that the psychic being is far away from the Divine.

It is not the psychic being which suffers, it is the mind, the vital and the ordinary consciousness of ignorant man.

*

About ten or eleven years ago I had an experience in Your presence and through You. I was in a great difficulty and was feeling quite lost. Suddenly I felt something that rose from the depths of my being, through a crowd of obstacles, and when this thing had come out above, all was changed in me; then I was in joy and peace and all difficulties suddenly disappeared. Since that day I have not had any difficulty which could bar my way.

What was this thing, Mother?

Certainly it was the psychic being, but it became active only through my intervention.

*

Now, if you don't like me to show you your faults, I can very well stop doing it. But then you should no longer ask me to help you to progress, for you cannot on the one hand ask me to intervene and on the other refuse my intervention.

*

If you are vexed by what I tell you, it proves that you do not wish to progress, and consequently that it is not necessary for me to make you aware of what is to be changed in you.

*

I feel, Mother, that I am a very frivolous fellow; won't You change me?

I would be very happy to change you, but are you quite sure that what is frivolous in you wants to change?

*

How do you expect me to help you if you have no trust in me!

*

I shall never be able to realise fully this relationship which exists eternally, if You don't help me to do it.

My help is there completely; you have only to open yourself to it with confidence and you will receive it.

*

Yes, my help is with you to master all the movements which are opposed to the Divine.

*

I have not the least intention in the world to push you into a corner, and if I had not the full assurance that you can overcome all these difficulties, I would not even have mentioned them. It is no good telling someone, "You have such and such a fault", if it does not help him to correct it.

*

This morning I was thinking I would get another blow from You.

I don't see why I should give you blows — I don't give them for the pleasure of giving them, but only when they are altogether indispensable.

*

After all, my whole life is consecrated to You; I shall remain very calm without bothering about what happens to me.

That's very good, but if you were to add to this the idea that I know you and love you better than you yourself do and that I know better than you what is good for you — then that would be perfect.

*

Mother of joy, I am surprised to find that there are people who think that You call only those sadhaks who cannot receive Your Grace from afar; and that it is a sign of weakness on the part of those who see You from time to time.

Don't bother about what people believe or say; it is almost always ignorant stupidities. I always wonder that people imagine they can know the reasons for my actions! I act differently for each one, according to the needs of his particular case.

*

I don't think it would be bad to let You know about a thought, an idea which goes on in me, even if this idea, this thought is bad.

On the contrary, it is good to let me know immediately.

*

Nothing is better than a confession for opening the closed doors. *Tell me what you fear most to tell me*, and immediately you will feel yourself closer to me.

THE MOTHER

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 153-69)

THE KEY TO THE DIVINE DOORS

(Continued from the issue of September 2018)

SINCERITY AND WILL

The importance of central sincerity and will

The human consciousness is made of many materials and all cannot bear quickly a constant spiritual endeavour — they have to be trained, enlightened, changed in their habits. That is why the Mother and I always give time for the soul to grow upon the other parts and we do not mind if it takes time, provided there is a central sincerity and will — as certainly there is in you. Do not be impatient or easily discouraged because things do not go fast. Aspire, try to keep yourself in the sunshine of confidence and let the seed grow. (S32: 117)

*

The best security in the sadhana

It is difficult to say that any particular quality makes one fit or the lack of it unfit. One may have strong sex impulses, doubts, revolts and yet succeed in the end, while another may fail. If one has a fundamental sincerity, a will to go through in spite of all things and a readiness to be guided, that is the best security in the sadhana. (S29: 33)

*

Sincerity is security

. . . Oh, but there are many who are in danger — because they're not sincere, anyone can deceive them. You know, in such cases, for occult danger, the *one thing* that's absolutely indispensable is sincerity. It's the safeguard and security. Sincerity is security. . . .

But I tell you, there are too many, too many insincerities, that's what opens the doors — insincerity is just like a sentry who opens the door, it's nothing but that. And unfortunately, there are lots and lots of insincerities. . . .

(*Mother's conversation with a disciple on 29 June 1963*)

*

All depends on your will and your sincerity

Now, all depends on your will and your sincerity. If you have the will no more to belong to ordinary humanity, no more to be merely evolved animals; if your will is to become men of the new race realising Sri Aurobindo's supramental ideal, living a new and higher life upon a new earth, you will find here all the necessary help to achieve your purpose; you will profit fully by your stay in the Ashram and eventually become living examples for the world. (M12: 117)

*

If you are truly sincere in your will, nothing will stop you

You must arm yourself with an endless patience and endurance. You do a thing once, ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times if necessary, but you do it till it gets done. And not done only here and there, but everywhere and everywhere at the same time. This is the great problem one sets oneself. That is why, to those who come to tell me very light-heartedly, "I want to do yoga", I reply, "Think it over, one may do the yoga for a number of years without noticing the least result. But if you want to do it, you must persist and persist with such a will that you should be ready to do it for ten lifetimes, a hundred lifetimes if necessary, in order to succeed." I do not say it will be like that, but the *attitude* must be like that. Nothing must discourage you; for there are all the difficulties of ignorance of the different states of being, to which are added the endless malice and the unbounded cunning of the hostile forces in the world. . . . They are there, do you know why? They have been tolerated, do you know why? — simply to see how long one can last out and how great is the sincerity in one's action. For everything depends upon your sincerity. If you are truly sincere in your will, nothing will stop you, you will go right to the end, and if it is necessary for you to live a thousand years to do it, you will live a thousand years to do it. (M4: 251-52)

*

The fire within can easily burn away impediments

They [*difficulties*] cannot permanently stand in the way of the soul, if the soul's aspiration is strong and firm, if the spiritual aim is the chief thing in the life. They are impediments which the fire within can easily burn away if the will to get rid of them is strong, and which it will surely burn away in the end, — though less easily — even if the outer nature clings long to them and justifies them — provided that central will, that deeper impulse is behind all, real and sincere. (S29: 40)

*

Only one thing important: a sincere and persistent will

There is “something”, there is a reality which is beyond all our expressions, but which we can succeed in contacting by practising a discipline. We can identify ourselves with it. Once one is identified with it one knows what it is, but one cannot express it, for words cannot say it. . . . One must try to enter into contact, to concentrate upon it, live it, live that reality, and whatever the name you give it is not at all important once you have the experience. The experience alone matters. . . . Sometimes one may read a whole book of philosophy and not progress a step farther. Sometimes one may be quite a fervent devotee of a religion and not progress. There are people who have spent entire lifetimes seated in contemplation and attained nothing. There are people (we have well-known examples) who used to do the most modest of manual works, like a cobbler mending old shoes, and who had an experience. It is altogether beyond what one thinks and says of it. It is a gift, that’s all. And all that is needed is to be that — to succeed in identifying oneself with it and live it. At times you read one sentence in a book and that leads you there. Sometimes you read entire books of philosophy or religion and they get you nowhere. There are people, however, whom the reading of philosophy books helps to go ahead. But all these things are secondary. There is only one thing that’s important: that is a sincere and persistent will, for these things don’t happen in a twinkling. So one must persevere. . . . (M6: 25-26)

*

All human beings have a spiritual destiny

All human beings have a spiritual destiny which is near or far depending on each one’s determination.

One must will in all sincerity. (M14: 30)

*

To be sincere in one’s resolution to serve the Truth

In what way should people serve the Truth? Is it to be served outwardly as well as inwardly?

Whoever is sincere in his resolution to serve the Truth will know, or rather be made to know, at each moment, what he or she must do to serve the Truth, for there are many ways of serving it. (Huta, *White Roses*, 1999, pp. 133-34, © Havyavahana Trust)

*

You must become single-minded

I have never said that Yoga or that this Yoga is a safe and easy path. What I say is that anyone who has the will to go through can go through. For the rest, if you aim high, there is always the danger of a steep fall if you misconduct your aeroplane. But the danger is for those who allow themselves to entertain a double being, aiming high but also indulging their lower outlook and hankerings. What else can you expect when people do that? You must become single-minded, then the difficulties of the mind and vital will be overcome. Otherwise those who oscillate between their heights and their abysses, will always be in danger till they have become single-minded. That applies to the “advanced” as well as to the beginner. These are facts of nature — I can’t pretend for anybody’s comfort that they are otherwise. But there is the fact also that nobody need keep himself in this danger. One-mindedness (*ekaniṣṭhā*), surrender to the Divine, faith, true love for the Divine, complete sincerity in the will, spiritual humility (real, not formal) — there are so many things that can be a safeguard against any chance of eventual downfall. Slips, stumbles, difficulties, upsets everyone has; one can’t be insured against these things, but if one has the safeguards, they are transitory, help the nature to learn and are followed by a better progress. (S31: 674-75)

*

The will must be a true will

Sincere is simply an adjective meaning that the will must be a true will. If you simply think “I aspire” and do things inconsistent with the aspiration, or follow your desires or open yourself to contrary influences, then it is not a sincere will.

(S29: 50)

*

To understand why the Mother does things

If people want to understand why the Mother does things, let them get into the same inner consciousness from which she sees and acts. As to what she is, that also can only be seen either with the eye of faith or of a deeper vision. That too is the reason why we keep here people who have not yet acquired the necessary faith or vision; we leave them to acquire it from within as they will do if their will of sadhana is sincere. (S32: 381)

*

To have the sincere will and make the endeavour

. . . certainly it is possible for X and Y and Z (I won't repeat the names) to change, to throw off their present perversities or limitations and come nearer to us than they are now — if they have the sincere will and make the endeavour. (S35: 410)

*

One can be perfectly sincere only when one is completely conscious

One can be perfectly sincere only when one is completely conscious. But keep your will to become more and more perfectly sincere — and everything will be all right. (M17: 136)

*

Life of true sincerity

What do You mean by a life of true sincerity?

To make all your actions conform to your highest aspiration and purest will. (M17: 130)

*

Sincerity at every point

In your sadhana what is important is sincerity at every point; if there is that, mistakes can be rectified and do not so much matter. If there is any insincerity, that pulls down the sadhana at once. But whether this constant sincerity is there or there is any falling off from it at any point, is a thing you must learn to see in yourself; if there is the earnest and constant will for it, the power to see will come. Sincerity does not at all depend on satisfying others — it is an inner matter and lies solely between you and me. (M14: 68)

*

A sincere will to get rid of depression and despondency

It is the devil of depression and despondency that we shall slay tonight — so that all those who have the sincere will to get rid of this disease will receive the necessary help to conquer. (M14: 245)

*

How to will

Sweet Mother, how can we make our resolution very firm?

By wanting it to be very firm! (*Laughter*)

No, this seems like a joke . . . but it is absolutely true. One does not want it truly. There is always, if you . . . It is a lack of sincerity. If you look sincerely, you will see that you have decided that it will be like this, and then, beneath there is something which has not decided at all and is waiting for the second of hesitation in order to rush forward. If you are sincere, if you are sincere and get hold of the part which is hiding, waiting, not showing itself, which knows that there will come a second of indecision when it can rush out and make you do the thing you have decided not to do . . .

But if you *really* want it, *nothing* in the world can prevent you from doing what you want. It is because one doesn't know how to will it. It is because one is *divided* in one's will. If you are not divided in your will, I say that nothing, nobody in the world can make you change your will.

But one doesn't know how to will it. In fact one doesn't even want to. These are velleities: "Well, it is like this. . . . It would be good if it were like that . . . yes, it would be better if it were like that . . . yes, it would be preferable if it were like that." But *this* is not to will. And always there at the back, hidden somewhere in a corner of the brain, is something which is looking on and saying, "Oh, why should I want that? After all one can as well want the opposite." And to try, you see . . . Not like that, just wait . . . But one can always find a thousand excuses to do the opposite. And ah, just a tiny little wavering is enough . . . pfft . . . the thing swoops down and there it is. But if one *wills*, if one really *knows* that *this* is the thing, and truly wants this, and if one is *oneself* entirely concentrated in the will, I say that there is *nothing* in the world that can prevent one from doing it, from doing it or being obliged to do it. It depends on what it is.

One wants. Yes, one wants, like this (*gestures*). One wants: "Yes, yes, it would be better if it were like that. Yes, it would be finer also, more elegant." . . . But, eh, eh, after all one is a weak creature, isn't that so? And then one can always put the blame upon something else: "It is the influence coming from outside, it is all kinds of circumstances."

A breath has passed, you see. You don't know . . . something . . . a moment of unconsciousness . . . "Oh, I was not conscious." You are not conscious because you do not accept . . . And all this because you don't know how to will.

To learn how to will is a very important thing. And to will truly, you must unify your being. In fact, to be a being, one must first unify oneself. If one is pulled by absolutely opposite tendencies, if one spends three-fourths of one's life without being conscious of oneself and the reasons why one does things, is one a real

being? One does not exist. One is a mass of influences, movements, forces, actions, reactions, but one is not a being. One begins to become a being when one begins to have a will. And one can't have a will unless one is unified.

And when you have a will, you will be able to say, say to the Divine: "I want what You want." But not before that. Because in order to want what the Divine wants, you must have a will, otherwise you can will nothing at all. You would like to. You would like it very much. You would very much like to want what the Divine wants to do. You don't possess a will to give to Him and to put at His service. Something like that, gelatinous, like jelly-fish . . . there . . . a mass of good wills — and I am considering the better side of things and forgetting the bad wills — a mass of good wills, half-conscious and fluctuating. . . .

Ah, that's all, my children. That's enough for today. There we are.

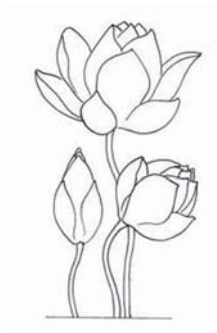
Only, put this into practice; just a little of what I have said, not all, eh, just a very little. There. (M6: 346-48)

*

To find one's discipline

. . . Note that if one didn't discipline the body, one would not even be able to stand on two legs, one would continue like a child on all fours. You could do nothing. You are obliged to discipline yourself; you could not live in society, you could not live at all, except all alone in the forest; and even then, I don't quite know. It is absolutely indispensable, I have told you this I don't know how often. And because I have a very marked aversion for conventional disciplines, social and others, it does not mean that you must abstain from all discipline. I would like everyone to find his own, in the sincerity of his inner aspiration and the will to realise himself.

(M8: 185)



A NEW EDUCATION FOR A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education

(Continued from the issue of September 2018)

*(The short notes preceding each section are by the editors of the compilation.
This compilation was published in 1992.)*

*The silent Soul of all the world was there:
A Being lived, a Presence and a Power,
A single Person who was himself and all
And cherished Nature's sweet and dangerous throbs
Transfigured into beats divine and pure.
One who could love without return for love,
Meeting and turning to the best the worst,
It healed the bitter cruelties of earth,
Transforming all experience to delight;
Intervening in the sorrowful paths of birth
It rocked the cradle of the cosmic Child
And stilled all weeping with its hand of joy;
It led things evil towards their secret good,
It turned racked falsehood into happy truth;
Its power was to reveal divinity.
Infinite, coeval with the mind of God,
It bore within itself a seed, a flame,
A seed from which the Eternal is new-born,
A flame that cancels death in mortal things.
All grew to all kindred and self and near;
The intimacy of God was everywhere,
No veil was felt, no brute barrier inert,
Distance could not divide, Time could not change.
A fire of passion burned in spirit-depths,
A constant touch of sweetness linked all hearts,
The throb of one adoration's single bliss
In a rapt ether of undying love.
An inner happiness abode in all,
A sense of universal harmonies,*

*A measureless secure eternity
Of truth and beauty and good and joy made one.
Here was the welling core of finite life;
A formless spirit became the soul of form.*

V. The Awakening of the Psychic

[. . .] The soul is something of the Divine that descends into the evolution as a divine Principle within it to support the evolution of the individual out of the Ignorance into the Light. It develops in the course of the evolution a psychic individual or soul individuality which grows from life to life, using the evolving mind, vital and body as its instruments. It is the soul that is immortal while the rest disintegrates; it passes from life to life carrying its experience in essence and the continuity of the evolution of the individual.

It is the whole consciousness, mental, vital, physical also, that has to rise and join the higher consciousness and, once the joining is made, the higher has to descend into them. The psychic is behind all that and supports it. (S28: 118)

*

It is only upon earth that the psychic life begins, and it is just the process by which the Divine has awakened material life to the necessity of rejoining its divine origin. Without the psychic, Matter would never have awakened from its inconscience, it would never have aspired for the life of its origin, the spiritual life. Therefore, the psychic being in the human being is the manifestation of spiritual aspiration . . .

(M4: 165)

*

. . . each human being is a self-developing soul and . . . the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material. It is not yet realised what this soul is or that the true secret, whether with child or man, is to help him to find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come forward, and still more if we call it into the foreground as “the leader of the march set in our front”, will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realisation of its potentialities of which our present mechanical view of life and man and external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience or

forming any conception. These new educational methods are on the straight way to this truer dealing. The closer touch attempted with the psychical entity behind the vital and physical mentality and an increasing reliance on its possibilities must lead to the ultimate discovery that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine and that the evocation of this real man within is the right object of education and indeed of all human life if it would find and live according to the hidden Truth and deepest law of its own being. (S25: 33)

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How to get in touch with the psychic, how to feel its presence?

What is the most effective means of awakening the psychic being?

But it is wide awake! And not only is it awake, but it acts, only you are not aware of it. It appears to you asleep because you don't perceive it!

Fundamentally, without this kind of inner will of the psychic being, I believe human beings would be quite dismal, dull, they would have an altogether animal life. Every gleam of aspiration is always the expression of a psychic influence. Without the presence of the psychic, without the psychic influence, there would never be any sense of progress or any will for progress. (M4: 165)

*

And if you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved.

The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That's it, you see — the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it. Rather you have . . . it acts now as an influence rather than as a Presence. It should be a conscious Presence, you should be able at each moment to ask yourself what is . . . how . . . how the Divine sees. It is like that: first how the Divine sees, and then how the Divine wills, and then how the Divine acts. And it is not to go away into inaccessible regions, it is right here. Only, for the moment, all the old habits and the general unconsciousness put a kind of covering which prevents us from seeing and feeling. You must . . . you must lift, you must lift that up.

In fact, you must become conscious instruments . . . conscious . . . conscious of the Divine.

Usually this takes a whole lifetime, or sometimes, for some people it is several lifetimes. Here, in the present conditions, you can do it in a few months. For those who are . . . who have an ardent aspiration, in a few *months* they can do it.

(M12: 428)

*

Do you know what the fourth dimension is? Do you know what it is?

We have heard about it . . .

Do you have the experience?

No, Sweet Mother.

Ah! But in fact that is the best approach of modern science: the fourth dimension. The Divine, for us, is the fourth dimension . . . within the fourth dimension. It is everywhere, you see, everywhere, always. It does not come and go, it is there, always, everywhere. It is we, our stupidity which prevents us from feeling. There is no need to go away, not at all, not at all, not at all.

To be conscious of your psychic being, you must once be capable of feeling the fourth dimension, otherwise you cannot know what it is. [. . .]

Indispensable, indispensable! Life begins with that. Otherwise one is in falsehood, in a muddle and in confusion and in darkness. The mind, mind, mind, mind! Otherwise, to be conscious of your own consciousness, you have to mentalise it. It is dreadful, dreadful! (M12: 429-30)

*

As the beginnings of the supramental life, which must be the next realisation in the unfolding of the universe, develop, perhaps not in a very obvious way but very surely, it becomes more and more obvious that the most difficult way to approach this supramental life is intellectual activity.

It could be said that it is much more difficult to pass from the mental to the supramental life than to pass from a certain psychic emotion in life — something that is like a reflection, a luminous emanation of the divine Presence in matter — to the supramental consciousness; it is much easier to pass from that into the supramental consciousness than to pass from the highest intellectual speculation to any supramental vibration. Perhaps it is the word that misleads us! Perhaps it is because we call it “supramental” that we expect to reach it through a higher intellectual mental activity? But the fact is very different. With this very high, very pure, very noble intellectual activity, one seems to move towards a kind of cold, powerless abstraction, a frozen, an icy light which is surely very remote from life and still further away from the experience of the supramental reality.

In this new substance which is spreading and acting in the world, there is a warmth, a power, a joy so intense that all intellectual activity seems cold and dry beside it. (M9: 324-25)

*

... the capacity for enthusiasm, something which throws you out of your miserable and mean little ego; and the generous gratitude, the generosity of the gratitude which also flings itself in thanksgiving out of the little ego. These are the two most powerful levers to enter into contact with the Divine in one's psychic being. This serves as a link with the psychic being — the surest link. (M7: 418-19)

*

It is essential for a child to remain sensitive to this "something" which, in the depths, calls for harmony and perfection, and provokes in him a kind of uneasiness when he does something against the truth of his being.

The joy that the child feels when he obeys his psychic, will grow stronger and deeper, and so will the need to remain in touch with this inner reality.

It is on such an experience that teaching can be based.

... if you want to find one teaching, one doctrine upon which to base your progress, you will never find anything — or, to be more exact, you will find something else, for in accordance with the climate, the age, the civilisation, the teaching given is quite conflicting. When one person says, "This is good", another will say, "No, this is bad", and with the same logic, the same persuasive force. Consequently, it is not upon this that one can build. Religion has always tried to establish a dogma, and it will tell you that if you conform to the dogma you are in the truth and if you don't you are in the falsehood. But all this has never led to anything and has only created confusion.

There is only one true guide, that is the inner guide, who does not pass through the mental consciousness.

Naturally, if a child gets a disastrous education, it will try ever harder to extinguish within itself this little true thing, and sometimes it succeeds so well that it loses all contact with it, and also the power of distinguishing between good and evil. That is why I insist upon this, and I say that from their infancy children must be taught that there is an inner reality — within themselves, within the earth, within the universe — and that they, the earth and the universe exist only as a function of this truth, and that if it did not exist the child would not last, even the short time that it does, and that everything would dissolve even as it comes into being. And because this is the real basis of the universe, naturally it is this which will triumph; and all that opposes this cannot endure as long as this does, because it is That, the eternal thing which is at the base of the universe.

It is not a question, of course, of giving a child philosophical explanations, but he could very well be given the feeling of this kind of inner comfort, of satisfaction, and sometimes, of an intense joy when he obeys this little very silent thing within him which will prevent him from doing what is contrary to it. It is on an experience

of this kind that teaching may be based. The child must be given the impression that nothing can endure if he does not have within himself this true satisfaction which alone is permanent. (M4: 24-25)

*

[How can one know whether the psychic being is in front.]

In fact, so long as there is any doubt or hesitation, so long as one asks oneself the question of whether one has or hasn't realised this eternal soul in oneself, it proves that the *true* contact has not taken place. For, when the phenomenon occurs, it brings with it an inexpressible something, so new and so definitive, that doubt and questioning are no longer possible. It is truly, in the absolute sense of the phrase, a new birth.

You become a new person, and whatever may be the path or the difficulties of the path afterwards, that feeling never leaves you. It is not even something — like many other experiences — which withdraws, passes into the background, leaving you externally with a kind of vague memory to which it is difficult to cling, whose remembrance grows faint, blurred — it is not that. You *are* a new person and definitively that, whatever happens. And even all the incapacity of the mind, all the difficulties of the vital, all the inertia of the physical are unable to change this new state — a new state which makes a *decisive* break in the life of the consciousness. The being one was before and the being one is after, are no longer the same. The position one has in the universe and in relation to it, in life and in relation to it, in understanding and in relation to it, is no longer the same: it is a true reversal which can never be undone again. (M9: 336-37)

*

In order to find the soul you must go in this way (*gesture of going deep within*), like this, draw back from the surface, withdraw deep within and enter, enter, enter, go down, down, down into a very deep hole, silent, immobile, and there, there's a kind of . . . something warm, quiet, rich in substance and very still, and very full, like a sweetness — that is the soul.

And if one is insistent and is conscious oneself, then there comes a kind of plenitude which gives the feeling of something complete that contains unfathomable depths in which, should one enter, one feels that many secrets would be revealed . . . like the reflection in very peaceful waters of something that is eternal. And one no longer feels limited by time.

One has the feeling of having always been and of being for eternity.

That is when one has touched the core of the soul.

And if the contact has been conscious and complete enough, it liberates you from the bondage of outer form; you no longer feel that you live only because you have a body. That is usually the ordinary sensation of the being, to be so tied to this outer form that when one thinks of “myself” one thinks of the body. That is the usual thing. The personal reality is the body’s reality. It is only when one has made an effort for inner development and tried to find something that is a little more stable in one’s being, that one can begin to feel that this “something” which is permanently conscious throughout all ages and all change, this something must be “myself”. But that already requires a study that is rather deep. Otherwise if you think “I am going to do this”, “I need that”, it is always your body, a small kind of will which is a mixture of sensations, of more or less confused sentimental reactions, and still more confused thoughts which form a mixture and are animated by an impulse, an attraction, a desire, some sort of a will; and all that momentarily becomes “myself” — but not directly, for one does not conceive this “myself” as independent of the head, the trunk, the arms and legs and all that moves — it is very closely linked.

It is only after having thought much, seen much, studied much, observed much that you begin to realise that the one is more or less independent of the other and that the will behind can make it either act or not act, and you begin not to be completely identified with the movement, the action, the realisation — that something is floating. But you have to observe much to see that.

And then you must observe much more still to see that this, the second thing that is there, this kind of active conscious will, is set in motion by “something else” which watches, judges, decides and tries to found its decisions on knowledge — that happens even much later. And so, when you begin to see this “something else”, you begin to see that it has the power to set in motion the second thing, which is an active will; and not only that, but that it has a very direct and very important action on the reactions, the feelings, the sensations, and that finally it can have control over all the movements of the being — this part which watches, observes, judges and decides.

That is the beginning of control.

When one becomes conscious of that, one has seized the thread, and when one speaks of control, one can know, “Ah! Yes, this is what has the power of control.”

This is how one learns to look at oneself. (M9: 310-11)

*

The revelations of the psychic mirror.

[. . .] The body is like a bag with pebbles and pearls all mixed up, and it is only the bag which keeps all that together. This is not a homogeneous, uniform consciousness but a heterogeneous one.

You can be a different person at different moments in your life. I know people who took decisions, had a strong will, knew what they wanted and prepared to do it. Then there was a little reversal in the being; another part came up and spoilt all the work in ten minutes. What had been accomplished in two months was all undone. When the first part comes back it is in dismay, it says: “What! . . .” Then the whole work has to be started again, slowly. Hence it is evident that it is very important to become aware of the psychic being; one must have a kind of signpost or a mirror in which all things are reflected and show themselves as they truly are. And then, according to what they are, one puts them in one place or another; one begins to explain, to organise. That takes time. The same part comes back three or four times and every part that comes up says: “Put me in the first place; what the others do is not important, not at all important, it is I who will decide, for I am the most important.” I am sure that if you look at yourself, you will see that there’s not one among you who has not had the experience. You want to become conscious, to have goodwill, you have understood, your aspiration is shining — all is brilliant, illuminated; but all of a sudden something happens, a useless conversation, some unfortunate reading, and that upsets everything. Then one thinks that it was an illusion one lived in, that all things were seen from a certain angle.

This is life. One stumbles and falls at the first occasion. One tells oneself: “Oh! One can’t always be so serious”, and when the other part returns, once again, one repents bitterly: “I was a fool, I have wasted my time, now I must begin again. . . .” At times there is one part that’s ill-humoured, in revolt, full of worries, and another which is progressive, full of surrender. All that, one after the other.

There is but one remedy: that signpost must always be there, a mirror well placed in one’s feelings, impulses, all one’s sensations. One sees them in this mirror. There are some which are not very beautiful or pleasant to look at; there are others which are beautiful, pleasant, and must be kept. This one does a hundred times a day if necessary. And it is very interesting. One draws a kind of big circle around the psychic mirror and arranges all the elements around it. If there is something that is not all right, it casts a sort of grey shadow upon the mirror: this element must be shifted, organised. It must be spoken to, made to understand, one must come out of that darkness. If you do that, you never get bored. [. . .] (M5: 9-10)

*

If one begins to find out, to understand what a feeling is and what a thought is, and how it works, then one can already go quite far on the path with that. One must at the same time observe how his feelings and thoughts have an action on the body, what the reciprocity is. And then, there is another exercise which consists in looking into oneself for what is persistent, what is lasting, something which makes one say “I”, and which is not the body. For obviously, when one was very small, and then when each year one grows up, if one takes fairly long distances, for example a distance of about ten years, they are very different “I”s from what one was when as small as this (*gesture*), and then what one is now; it is difficult to say that it is the same person, you see. If one takes only this, still there is something which has the feeling of always being the same person. So one must reflect, seek, try to understand what it is. This indeed can lead you far on the path. Then if one also studies the relation between these different things — between thoughts, feelings, their action on the body, the reciprocal action of the body on these things — and also what it is that says “I” permanently, what it is that can trace a curve in the movement of the being, if one seeks carefully enough, it leads you quite far. Naturally if one seeks far enough and with enough persistence, one reaches the psychic.

It is the path to lead you to the psychic; and so this is the experience, it is the first experience. When one has the contact with the permanent part of one’s immortal being, through this immortality one can go still further and reach the Eternal. It is still another state of consciousness. But it is in this way that one follows the path, gradually. (M7: 77-78)

*

[The fundamental purpose of psychic education]

The psychic or spiritual consciousness gives you the deep inner realisation, contact with the Divine, liberation from external fetters; but for this liberation to be effective, for it to have an action on the rest of the being, the mind must be open enough to be able to hold the spiritual light of Knowledge, the vital must be powerful enough to handle the forces behind appearances and dominate them, and the physical should be disciplined, organised enough to be able to *express* the deep experience, in the movements of each day and each moment, and live it integrally.

If one of these things is lacking, the result is not complete. One can make light of this thing or that under the pretext that it is not the most important, the central Thing — and to neglect outer things certainly cannot prevent you from entering into spiritual communion with the Supreme, but that is good only for a flight from life.

If we are to be total, complete beings, to have an integral realisation, we should be able to express our spiritual experience mentally, vitally and physically. And the

more our expression is perfect, executed by a complete and perfect being, the more integral and perfect will our realisation be. (M9: 345-46)

*

[. . .] everyone has countless possibilities within him of which he is unaware and which develop only if he does what is to be done in the way it should be done. . . . But there are two types of progress, not only one; there is the progress that consists in perfecting more and more the capacities, possibilities, faculties and qualities you have — this is what is normally obtained by education; but if you go in for a little more thorough development by approaching a deeper truth, you can add, to the qualities you already have, other new ones which seem to be asleep in your being.

You can multiply your possibilities, enlarge and increase them; you can suddenly bring up something you did not think you had. I have already explained this to you several times. When one discovers one's psychic being within, at the same time there develop and manifest, quite unexpectedly, things one could not do at all before and which one didn't think were in one's nature. Of this too I have had numerous examples. [. . .]

There is a genius within everyone of us — we don't know it. We must find the way to make it come out — but it is there sleeping, it asks for nothing better than to manifest; we must open the door to it. (M9: 396)

*

Every human being carries hidden within him the possibility of a greater consciousness which goes beyond the bounds of his present life and enables him to share in a higher and a vaster life. Indeed, in all exceptional beings it is always this consciousness that governs their lives and organises both the circumstances of their existence and their individual reaction to these circumstances. What the human mental consciousness does not know and cannot do, this consciousness knows and does. It is like a light that shines at the centre of the being, radiating through the thick coverings of the external consciousness. Some have a vague intimation of its presence; a good many children are under its influence, which shows itself very distinctly at times in their spontaneous actions and even in their words. Unfortunately, since parents most often do not know what it is and do not understand what is happening in their child, their reaction to these phenomena is not a good one and all their education consists in making the child as unconscious as possible in this domain and concentrating all his attention on external things, thus accustoming him to think that they are the only ones that matter. It is true that this concentration on external things is very useful, provided that it is done in the proper way. The three lines of education — physical, vital and mental — deal with that and could be defined as the means of

building up the personality, raising the individual out of the amorphous subconscious mass and making him a well-defined self-conscious entity. With psychic education we come to the problem of the true motive of existence, the purpose of life on earth, the discovery to which this life must lead and the result of that discovery: the consecration of the individual to his eternal principle. [. . .]

It is through this psychic presence that the truth of an individual being comes into contact with him and the circumstances of his life. In most cases the presence acts, so to say, from behind the veil, unrecognised and unknown; but in some, it is perceptible and its action recognisable and even, in a very few, the presence becomes tangible and its action fully effective. These go forward in life with an assurance and a certitude all their own; they are masters of their destiny. It is for the purpose of obtaining this mastery and becoming conscious of the psychic presence that psychic education should be practised. But for that there is need of a special factor, the personal will. For till now, the discovery of the psychic being and identification with it have not been among the recognised subjects of education, and although one can find in special treatises useful and practical hints on the subject, and although in exceptional cases one may have the good fortune of meeting someone who is capable of showing the way and giving the help that is needed to follow it, most often the attempt is left to one's own personal initiative. The discovery is a personal matter and a great determination, a strong will and an untiring perseverance are indispensable to reach the goal. [. . .]

The starting-point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion, unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all. What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animals speak in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation; there are others, many others. All help you to go beyond the barriers of your egoism, the walls of your external personality, the impotence of your reactions and the incapacity of your will.

But, as I have already said, the path to that realisation is long and difficult, strewn with snares and problems to be solved, which demand an unflinching determination. It is like the explorer's trek through virgin forest in quest of an unknown land, of some great discovery. The psychic being is also a great discovery which requires at least as much fortitude and endurance as the discovery of new

continents. A few simple words of advice may be useful to one who has resolved to undertake it.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the mind is incapable of judging spiritual things. All those who have written on this subject have said so; but very few are those who have put it into practice. And yet, in order to proceed on the path, it is absolutely indispensable to abstain from all mental opinion and reaction.

Give up all personal seeking for comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment or happiness. Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.

Try to take pleasure in all you do, but never do anything for the sake of pleasure.

Never get excited, nervous or agitated. Remain perfectly calm in the face of all circumstances. And yet be always alert to discover what progress you still have to make and lose no time in making it.

Never take physical happenings at their face value. They are always a clumsy attempt to express something else, the true thing which escapes our superficial understanding.

Never complain of the behaviour of anyone, unless you have the power to change in his nature what makes him act in this way; and if you have the power, change him instead of complaining.

Whatever you do, never forget the goal which you have set before you. There is nothing great or small once you have set out on this great discovery; all things are equally important and can either hasten or delay its success. Thus before you eat, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the food you are about to eat may bring your body the substance it needs to serve as a solid basis for your effort towards the great discovery, and give it the energy for persistence and perseverance in the effort.

Before you go to sleep, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the sleep may restore your fatigued nerves, bring calm and quietness to your brain so that on waking you may, with renewed vigour, begin again your journey on the path of the great discovery.

Before you act, concentrate in the will that your action may help or at least in no way hinder your march forward towards the great discovery.

When you speak, before the words come out of your mouth, concentrate just long enough to check your words and allow only those that are absolutely necessary to pass, only those that are not in any way harmful to your progress on the path of the great discovery.

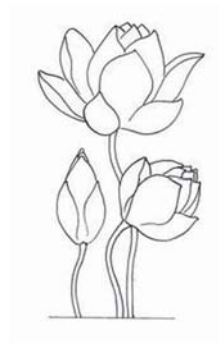
To sum up, never forget the purpose and goal of your life. The will for the great discovery should be always there above you, above what you do and what you are, like a huge bird of light dominating all the movements of your being.

Before the untiring persistence of your effort, an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour that will bring you the certitude

of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out. Then you will stand erect, freed from all chains, and instead of advancing laboriously under the weight of circumstances imposed upon you by Nature, which you had to endure and bear if you did not want to be crushed by them, you will be able to walk on, straight and firm, conscious of your destiny, master of your life. (M12: 30-35)

(To be continued)

(A New Education for a New Consciousness,
published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1992)



**“YOUR FACE” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

Has this poem too “brainy” an air? What do you think of the turn in the last stanza?

YOUR FACE

Your face unveils the cry,
Divinely deep,
|| Heard from the inscrutable core
Of mystic sleep —

~~core~~

|| A lure of rapturous tune¹
Where vision fails,
Like a nest of heaven-hearted
Nightingales.

~~hush~~ ~~reach~~
No ~~calm~~ of love could catch
That soul of swoon:
Dawn’s body ever crossed
My dream too soon.

But now with a face of dawn

Night { ~~yearns~~
~~laughs~~ to me,
~~calls~~

|| Kindling the distances
Of lost divinity.

[Amal’s remark in the margin:]

1. Please don’t forget to scratch out the rejected words — in this stanza and the next two.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “core”, “calm”, “reach”, “laughs”, “calls”.*]
 [*The double marks in the margin are Sri Aurobindo’s.*]

I don’t find it brainy in any unpoetic sense — the turn in the last stanza might have been thought “ingenious” if it had not been given so fine a poetic form. A very fine little lyric with that intuitively felicitous choice of words which is very usual with you when you write in this kind.

3 June 1937

YOUR FACE

Your face unveils the cry,
 Divinely deep,
 Heard from the inscrutable core
 Of mystic sleep —

A lure of rapturous tune
 Where vision fails,
 Like a nest of heaven-hearted
 Nightingales.

No hush of love could catch
 That soul of swoon:
 Dawn’s body ever crossed
 My dream too soon.

But now with a face of dawn
 Night yearns to me,
 Kindling the distances
 Of lost divinity.

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

“A PICTURE OF SUBLIME SIGNIFICANCE IN THE MIND’S EYE”

29th February 1972

This wonderful dawn that came with a mantle of dreamy mists, the dawn that had compelled even the sleeping souls to awaken, was the dawn that had waited a millennium to witness the grand fusion of the flowering of human consciousness with the Divine Consciousness. It was a dawn reminiscent of Vedic times. With a big bonfire lit in the centre of the joint symbol of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo at the bottom of the artistically terraced excavation and with the large gathering congregated at the embankment above, everything appeared set for a huge holocaust. The fiery flames danced with a divine delight. The atmosphere was already vibrant with a vast Presence which ensured an unflinching Victory for the stupendous Temple of The Divine Mother. Even the gods abandoned their heavenly abodes to witness the grand earthly drama. There was an intense aspiration in every heart and an intangible expectancy in the air.

Now, the golden rim of the rising sun emerged slowly and the sky was ensaffroned with indescribable hues that heralded the Dawn and its first rays pierced through the morning mist and lent a strange luminosity to the ordinary light and stirred spiritual vibrations in the atmosphere. A Powerful Presence burst upon the aspiring hearts. The veil was lifted from the mystery of the Spirit. From the flames arose a vast resplendent four-fold Form of the Divine Mother, a million lightnings struck at once and lit up the worshipful faces of the aspirants and an endless outpouring of Divine Consciousness flowed into the foundation and beckoned with its beautifully benign gesture, the human consciousness to unite itself once more with the Divine’s. Then started moving the long line of Sadhaks each carrying a pebble, one by one dropping it in the appointed place. It was not a pebble only, but a human portion of each one’s consciousness which there mingled and fused with the Divine’s and became a force invincible in helping manifest the grand mansion of the Supramental in this world.

ARJUN TALREJA

AN EXCERPT FROM “MATRIMANDIR DIARY”

The fourth anniversary of the supramental Manifestation (the fourth leap year since 1956) was celebrated as a darshan day, except for the fact that there was no darshan; the Mother did not appear on the balcony. Early in the morning, at about 6:00 a.m. there was again something going on at the Matrimandir. This time something more typical of the new consciousness: not meditation but work. Having symbolically initiated the second phase of the construction on February 21, today the work began in earnest with the casting of real cement. From the mixer it came down the chute, whence the pans of cement were handed along a chain of about fifty people and finally poured. Again there was that beautiful charged atmosphere which makes you clearly aware that even this gray cement is much more than just lifeless matter, it becomes something golden, something alive; physically working with it is a kind of ceremony, an alchemy, a transmutation of matter into spirit. I realised how it was a priestly act, really an experienced act of consecration and transsubstantiation of the Body of God.

RUUD LOHMAN

Editorial Note:

Shyam Sunder's note in *Down Memory Lane* mentions that on 29th February, at 6 a.m. concreting work of the Matrimandir pillar would start and that there would be meditation.

Courtesy: Auroville Archives

POEMS FROM AUROVILLE

WILL YOU TAKE THIS LITTLE BIT I HAVE . . .

Will you take this little bit I have
It's not much . . . but it's mine.
What is more precious than what we are
The gift of our selves is better by far
Than rings and things that money can buy.

I sigh, when I see, the agony
Of those who reach for a star.
Give what you are, what you are.
What you are is better by far.
Than rings and things that money can buy.

Will you take this little bit I have
It's not much . . . but it's mine. . . . It's yours.

JOHN O'NEILL

GRAVITY

Wind-blown seeds
circle
in soft cushioned currents
to earth
while hammer blows
pound
this crude
and heavy
human ore
to birth.
Our first breath is a cry
as we breach this world
ripped through sheaths that coat and shield us
as we plunge

through atmospheres of fire
 gripped by
 gravity and
 grave.
 We land upon a lost shore
 gasping,
 thrust through waves of darkness burning bright,
 beached by breakers in seaworthy bodies
 that now must find their footing and their breath —
 brine-slick bodies that do not yet belong to us
 as we reach back in anguish for that truer gravity
 which held us
 and which we now must find again
 here in our birth and forgetting
 where all things
 fall.
 Doomed we are by a destiny
 whose downward pull
 draws us through the dense and unbearable weight
 of our lives to that unyielding door
 where life unburdens
 and enters its chrysalis of death.
 Ma, we moan with that last thread of breath
 sealing the cocoon;

Ma, we cry with that first as we begin again,
 unraveling the tomb,
 one gravity defying another.
 Doomed we are by a destiny we call upon ourselves.
 Hidden in each muttered mantric cry
 we weave our way blindly back to Her,
 hurtling through space like lead-grained pearls
 strung on gossamer threads of an unseen Grace,
 free-falling in fear despite Her sure embrace
 toward some future body's
 secret serpent base.
 At speeds of absolute stillness we strike
 that utter Ground,
 irresistibly drawn by the coiled note of a flute
 whose magnetic Sound
 silences our terror,

luring this raw resistant human ore,
 fusing it into its fiery Being's core,
 melting the ego's shadow-mold,
 filling all bodies
 with a deathless gold
 that wells up
 from some conscious
 centerpoint of Soul.
 A Gravity of Grace springing
 from a Mother's fathomless heart,
 each fall now bringing us closer
 as it once pulled us apart.
 We are seized by the sweetness
 of some inmost psychic pole
 where all gravities resolve
 in the passionate clasp of the Whole.
 Ma, we sing now as we rise,
 our earth a joyous transparent sun
 surrounded from within by Her Gravity of One
 in which there is no longer below or above
 but only the all-compelling light
 and all-attracting force of Love.

SAVITRA (ALAN SASHA LITHMAN)

DEEP PLACES

I'm in no mood for mountains . . .
 Too near down-pressing sky,
 Too barren, bright, unmystieried they lie!
 So, climbing to a bald white peak
 I stopped — knee-deep in grass and flowers.
 Better by far the lower forests,
 Where water gurgles out of sight,
 And calling, chuckling, birds unseen
 Flit from green to deeper green;
 There suddenly a single bloom
 Strikes to the heart's enchanted depths
 With its clear bell-note of deep blue.
 Or let me swim, far from all shallows,

In the still waters where the kraken sleeps,
 Where whales slide singing through the shadowy deeps;
 There let me dive and drown
 All littleness and all fatigue.
 But best of all, in deep embracing interstellar spaces
 Beyond the sky-lid, free of every limit,
 To float forever marvelling
 Through endless symphonies of stars!

REMEMBERING

Smoothly contoured,
 Cool and heavy in my hand,
 Its glassy skin pocked and pitted,
 This stone speaks
 Of rolling and grinding in distant torrents.
 One scarred and bumpy surface tells
 That once it was torn rough and raw away
 From the side of its mother-mountain;
 And these encircling veins
 Remind how long before
 This substance seethed and folded over,
 Was kneaded like dough,
 Baked in the earth's furnace,
 Pressed out to cool and petrify.
 Long before that perhaps
 Atoms now packed dense inside this lump
 Flared out — a cloud in the solar wind.
 Long it lay, oblivious;
 But now another force,
 More resistless than all these
 Has carried it far
 From that river-carved mountain
 To lie here:
 Cool and heavy to a human hand,
 Questioned by a human gaze,
 Remembering

PEARL FISHING

Useless all day . . .
 A head full of poems
 Doesn't make for practicality.
 The pull of the dark tide
 Calling me under
 To coral gardens and pearl-beds
 Loosens my grip
 My fingers flutter and lose hold.
 Plans and duties fade
 And the forms that anchor us to the surface . . .
 Leaving beds unmade
 Dishes unwashed
 Important messages unanswered and
 Urgent letters unwritten,
 I dip again and again
 In the dark flood
 And come up dripping
 Disoriented
 Clutching some bright or curious fragment
 Some morsel of frozen music.
 Turning it over and over,
 Tasting its strange saltiness,
 I end up
 Sprinkling stars in the soup.

HOW TO GO THROUGH ?

Sucking the sky
 gulping in earth, devouring trees,
 soaking up the play of sunlight and shadow
 I drink back life, nourished by this beauty.
 But how to go through ?
 This eye-defying blue
 that is our sky,
 This sun we cannot look upon,
 nor bear too long his rays
 Are only shadows of That Light . . .
 These perfect trees

who dance for joy
 in rhythms delicate and grave
 Are only sketches, faint indications,
 of the Beauty His creative vision gave;
 And all these forms, though beautiful,
 Do not reveal, but hide, His face.
 Draw back, my soul,
 From thought, from sense,
 And know thyself entire
 In His embrace.

EVENING ILLUMINATION

Grey upon grey the troubled cloud-race
 Racked through with flickers of impending storm
 Breaks open to reveal a sudden space
 Intensely blue . . . and one calm star.

Steady behind these veils of shifting form,
 Smiling, insistent, serene and far,
 Unwavering it calls me to behold
 All Heaven opening beyond that speck of gold!

SHRADDHAVAN

Poetry, like the kindred arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is mental and verbal and not material. The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of the sight or be included in it, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Future Poetry, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 26)

PUJALAL'S NEW WAY OF LIFE

For many years I visited Pujalal every few months just to say hello and to bask in the benign atmosphere around him. A couple of times he gave me good advice. Once I was thinking of taking a trip to America — my mother was pulling me there.

“You haven’t been home in ten years,” she said. “Can’t you come for just a few weeks? Your family would love to see you again.” Troubled in heart, I went to him for advice.

“How is your sadhana going?” he asked me.

“Fine!” I said. “It’s fine. I’m quite happy.”

“Well, if things are going smoothly,” he said, “maybe you should stay here. When things are going well, why disturb them?” It was just what I wanted to hear!

But four years later, I was bothered again by the same question, and this time I was deeply disturbed, with recurrent distressing dreams at night. I went to him for help and he immediately said,

“Yes, go. Make your mother happy.” And he added, “Be sure to buy a round-trip ticket.”

Another time, when I went to him on my birthday, he handed me a ‘Bonne Fête’ card on which he had written, “Once given, given for ever.” I cherish those words.

Towards the end of his life, Pujalal suffered unremitting pain for many months — severe sciatica, intense pain radiating constantly through the nerves of his hips and legs. To relieve the pressure, the doctor put him in traction; his legs were often hung up on a pulley at the end of his bed. Now and then I would peep through the door of his room, wondering whether to drop in. I wanted to see him, but I didn’t want to draw on his energy — I figured he needed it to bear the pain.

One day when the urge to see him came up again, I peered into his room. Pujalal seemed to be sleeping and no one else was there. I went in quietly, sat on a chair and just watched him for a while. He looked smaller than before, flushed and tender; I sensed he had suffered much. Then he stirred, slowly turned his head towards me and greeted me with a big smile.

“Bob,” he said in a weak but cheerful voice, “where have you been? It’s been a long time.” What welcome words!

There was a moment of silence. Then pointing to his legs suspended in the air, he grinned and said, “Look, I am learning a new way of life.”

“My God,” I thought, “he has been suffering terrible pain for months and now he is joking about it.” We lapsed into silence for a while and then I said goodbye.

That was my last meeting with Pujalal.

His parting gift will always remain with me — a living example of how to face

the pain and suffering of life: smile and, if you can, laugh about it.
When my time comes, I will try. It is the least I can do for him.

BOB ZWICKER

There are many wrong ideas current about surrender. Most people seem to look upon surrender as an abdication of the personality; but that is a grievous error. For the individual is meant to manifest one aspect of the Divine Consciousness, and the expression of its characteristic nature is what creates his personality; then, by taking the right attitude towards the Divine, this personality is purified of all the influences of the lower nature which diminish and distort it and it becomes more strongly personal, more itself, more complete. The truth and power of the personality come out with a more resplendent distinctness, its character is more precisely marked than it could possibly be when mixed with all the obscurity and ignorance, all the dirt and alloy of the lower nature. It undergoes a heightening and glorification, an aggrandisement of capacity, a realisation of the maximum of its possibilities.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1929-31, CWM 2nd Ed, Vol. 3, p. 116)

MAN OF A MOMENTOUS MOMENT — MANDELA

Born on 18th July 1918 Nelson Mandela died on 5th December 2013 at the ripe age of 95 years. In his centenary year we remember this great man of Africa who made tremendous sacrifices for his nation and has been an inspiration to millions, including world leaders running across almost all nations. On his passing the *Guardian*, London wrote: “Mandela sought to follow in the footsteps of earlier heroes of peaceful resistance such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, but not even they were lionised around the globe by so many leaders from such a wide ideological spectrum.”¹ His kindness, charisma, self-deprecating sense of humour and lack of bitterness over his harsh treatment, as well as his amazing life story as a revolutionary, prisoner and statesman, partly explain his extraordinary global appeal. That Mandela survived 27 years of imprisonment and yet on his release from prison came out smiling demonstrates his magnanimity, indelible sense of dignity and an iron will.

After twenty-seven and a half years of adult life in jail Nelson Mandela was released from prison at an age when most people are long retired. Prison had taken away the most precious years of his life. It had also taken away his family life and relations with some of his children were strained. For a man of exceptional talents, at the zenith of his political life bursting with energy and creativeness, to be imprisoned on an isolated barren island, denied the opportunity to explore and discover himself by interacting with nature and people let alone serving society and his country was not only an immense tragic misfortune but a personal catastrophe. Mandela exuded warmth and was a people’s person; he, especially, always felt most at ease with children, and in some ways his greatest regret was not hearing a baby cry or holding a child’s hand. His love for nature was imbibed from childhood, he describes his birthplace at a tiny village as “a beautiful country of rolling hills, fertile valleys, and a thousand rivers and streams which keep the landscape green even in winter”; he also had a “lifelong love of gardening and growing vegetables” since his school days. Besides these two deprivations, the conditions in the Robben Island prison were harsh and his sentence of life imprisonment meant he would spend the rest of his whole life in prison. Indeed, the white government had created circumstances and conditions to curb his spirit and break his will. But providentially, as we shall learn in the course of the article, Mandela used this adversity as a springboard to progress as a human being.

When Mandela was asked, “Is it true that when you were freed at age 71, it was like being born again?” he replied, “Yes.”²

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-death-giant-among-men>.

2. <http://www.oprah.com/world/Oprah-Interviews-Nelson-Mandela/>

The question most often asked about Mandela was how, after whites had systematically oppressed, humiliated, tortured and murdered his people including many of his friends, and cast him into prison for 27 years, he could be so free of spite.

This is what former US President, Bill Clinton, wrote a few years ago:

Mandela made a grand, elegant, dignified exit from prison and it was very, very powerful for the world to see. But as I watched him walking down that dusty road, I wondered whether he was thinking about the last 27 years, whether he was angry all over again. Later, many years later, I had a chance to ask him. I said, “Come on, you were a great man, you invited your jailers to your inauguration, you put your pressures on the government. But tell me the truth. Weren’t you really angry all over again?” And he said, “Yes, I was angry. And I was a little afraid. After all I’ve not been free in so long. But,” he said, “when I felt that anger well up inside of me I realised that if I hated them after I got outside that gate then they would still have me.” And he smiled and said, “I wanted to be free so I let it go.” It was an astonishing moment in my life. It changed me.³

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela writes of a press conference that he gave a day after his release from prison: “I was asked as well about the fears of whites. I knew that people expected me to harbour anger towards whites. But I had none. In prison, my anger towards whites decreased, but my hatred for the system grew. I wanted South Africa to see that I loved even my enemies while I hated the system that turned us against one another. I wanted to impress upon the reporters the critical role of whites in any new dispensation.”⁴

Alan Titchmarsh, gardener and broadcaster, who claimed “making a garden for Nelson Mandela will remain one of my proudest boasts”, wrote: “When I asked why he felt no bitterness his answer was typically pragmatic: ‘There is no time for bitterness; there is too much to do.’”⁵

In the early 1990s, President F.W. De Klerk told a BBC correspondent how he found Mandela’s lack of bitterness “astonishing”.⁶

In a 2007 interview Mandela was asked how he had kept his hatred in check despite all the torments and humiliations he had faced over the decades. His answer was detached: “Hating clouds the mind. It gets in the way of strategy. Leaders cannot afford to hate.”⁷

3. www.theendlessfurther.com; See Times of India, The Speaking Tree, 27th July 2014.

4. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 680.

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered>.

6. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22892784>.

7. See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?l

Besides enduring extremely harsh prison conditions one of Mandela's greatest qualities was that he was not a reactive person but a proactive one. He did not brood over his misfortune of being a prisoner for life on Robben Island. Instead, he started working on himself and brought a transformation in his nature. By his own admission he was quite fiery and hot-tempered in the 1940s and 1950s and at times arrogant too. In *Mandela: The Authorized Biography*, Anthony Sampson notes the remarkable transformation in the Mandela that emerged from jail compared with the impulsive activist with a quick temper he knew in the late 1950s. Mandela acknowledged the importance of mastering his anger and of learning this art whilst in prison. He said: "But in jail — especially for those who stayed in single cells — you had enough opportunity to sit down and think. And you were in contact with a lot of people who had a high education and who were widely travelled. When they told of their experiences, you felt humbled. All those influences changed one."⁸

Sampson quotes from a letter that Mandela wrote to his then wife, Winnie, in 1981 after she had been jailed. Mandela noted that there were qualities "in each one of us" that form the basis of our spiritual life and that we can change ourselves by observing our reactions to the unfolding of life. In the letter he urged Winnie "to learn to know yourself . . . to search realistically and regularly the processes of your own mind and feelings."⁹

Mandela revealed to talk-show host Oprah Winfrey that if he hadn't been in prison, he wouldn't have achieved the most difficult task in life — changing himself.

In prison Mandela had time to reflect and correct some of his defects. He says that one of the most powerful forces that changed him was thinking about his response to the generosity he had received from people in the past. "For example, when I arrived in Johannesburg [as a young man], I was poor, and many people helped me get by. But when I became a lawyer and I was in a better position [financially], I became too busy with legal affairs and forgot about people who had helped me. Instead of going to them and saying: Look, here's a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates and saying thank you, I had never even thought about these things. I felt that I had behaved like a wild man . . . like an animal and I really criticised myself for the way I had behaved. But I was able to do this because I had time to think about it, whereas outside jail — from morning to sunset — you are moving from one meeting to the other, and there is no time to think about problems. Thinking is one of the most important weapons in dealing with problems . . . and we didn't have that outside."¹⁰

Mandela has said: "One of the most difficult things is not to change society — but to change yourself."¹¹

8. See http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp

9. See http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp

10. See http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes.

11. http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS764&txtstr=quotes.

Time magazine managing editor Richard Stengel once called him, “the closest thing the world has to a secular saint.”¹² Stengel wrote, “The man who walked onto Robben Island in 1964 was emotional, headstrong, easily stung. The man who emerged was balanced and disciplined.” He adds: “I often asked him how the man who emerged from prison differed from the wilful young man who had entered it. He hated this question. Finally, in exasperation one day, he said, ‘I came out mature.’”¹³

On his release from jail in February 1990 Mandela, remarkably, showed no bitterness. He was constantly smiling and exuded warmth; and this rubbed off on the unprecedented crowds who came to meet him. This was also a conscious decision, to bring a sense of calm in the tense apartheid-divided nation. Blacks at that stage were simmering with anger and hatred at the oppression they had faced for decades, and knew that they had reached a watershed point and a chance to avenge themselves. But Mandela’s cheerful appearance, sans any resentment after more than two and half decades in prison, brought a sense of calm to all those who came to meet and hear him. As events followed it was clear that one of his greatest contributions to South Africa and the world is the notion of reconciliation and forgiveness rather than retribution and punishment.

South African novelist, playwright and poet, Zakes Mda, wrote of Mandela’s indispensable role of keeping the country united at a very critical stage of its history: “I saw in him a skillful politician whose policy of reconciliation saved the country from a blood bath and ushered it into a period of democracy, human rights and tolerance. I admired him for his compassion and generosity, values that are not usually associated with politicians. I also admired him for his integrity and loyalty.”¹⁴

Later when Mandela became president he continued to preach the gospel of reconciliation, not least to the Afrikaners. He went to see hardliner ex-president Botha, who used the opportunity to discuss political issues with him. He had tea with Betsy Verwoerd, the widow of Hendrik Verwoerd, the intellectual builder of apartheid. Mandela even found time for a lunch with Percy Yutar, the vindictive prosecutor who had tried to have him executed at the Rivonia Trial. A mellowed and humbled Yutar declared that he was struck by “the great humility of this saintly man”.¹⁵

The Mother has said: “If one could create a magnificent story without any horror in it, nothing but beauty, it would have a *considerable* influence on everyone’s life. And this is what people don’t know.”¹⁶

12. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2013/06/24/what-nelson-mandela-had>.

13. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1821659-3,00.html> (Interview with Time).

14. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/contradictions-mandela-zakes-mda-new-york-times-5-december>.

15. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/nelson-mandela/8286462/Nelson-Mandela-obituary>.

16. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 8, p. 118.

Mandela's story is wonderful: he combatted an oppressive regime and by crafting something beautiful and noble in himself, he changed the people, influencing the blacks to bury their differences with the whites so that the nation could live in harmony.

Early life

A few years after the bitter Anglo-Boer war in 1899-1902, the white-skinned peoples of South Africa patched up their differences and erected a system of racial domination against the dark-skinned people of their own land. Their rule was harsh, humiliating and inhuman to the darker-skinned population. Mandela was born just after this racial system was introduced into the proud Xhosa-speaking Thembu people in Mvezo, a tiny village of cows, corn and mud huts in the rolling hills of the Transkei, a former British protectorate in the south. He was born Rolihlahla Mandela. His first name, he enjoyed pointing out, translates colloquially as "troublemaker". He received his more familiar English name from a teacher when he began school at age 7. He was one of nine children; his father was a chief of the village and also a respected counsellor to the king of the Thembu tribe. Under British rule, the role of chief, although esteemed, was no longer as influential because of the control of an unsympathetic white government. Each Xhosa belongs to a clan that traces back to a specific forefather. Mandela is often addressed by his clan name Madiba — an 18th century Thembu chief — as a sign of respect.

Mandela was related to the royal Thembu household and was being groomed, like his father before him, to counsel the rulers of the tribe. His father died when Mandela was twelve and because his father had done a great favour to the acting Regent of the Thembu people, chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo, the acting Regent became his benefactor and guardian for the next decade. The young Mandela received a privileged upbringing and received the best education at that time.

Unlike many black South Africans, whose confidence had been crushed by generations of officially proclaimed white superiority, Mandela never seemed to doubt that he was the equal of any man. "The first thing to remember about Mandela is that he came from a royal family," said Ahmed Kathrada, an activist who shared a prison cellblock with Mandela and was part of his inner circle, "that always gave him a strength."¹⁷

Mandela speaks of three characteristics he inherited from his father — stubbornness, rebelliousness and a sense of fairness. He writes of his father, "He could be exceedingly stubborn, another trait that may unfortunately have been passed down from father to son."¹⁸ As a chief, Mandela's father reported not only to the Thembu

17. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?

18. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 5.

king but to the local magistrate. One day the magistrate summoned him; but on a matter of principle of asserting his traditional prerogative as a chief, he deliberately did not appear. One did not defy magistrates in those days. Mandela's father was charged with insubordination and he lost his chieftainship and his fortune — he was deprived of most of his land and herd. Alluding to this incident Mandela said that “my father possessed a proud rebelliousness, a stubborn sense of fairness, that I recognise in myself.”¹⁹

During his childhood Mandela learnt a lesson that would greatly help in his later life. Whilst trying to ride an unruly donkey he fell into a thornbush. The thorns pricked and scratched Mandela's face causing him embarrassment in front of his friends. “Africans have a highly developed sense of dignity,” writes Mandela, “I had lost face among my friends. Even though it was a donkey that unseated me, I learned that to humiliate another person is to make him suffer an unnecessarily cruel fate. Even as a boy, I defeated my opponents without dishonouring them.”²⁰ Alluding to his political life Mandela said, “It never helps to take a morally superior tone to one's opponent.”²¹ He also observed, “When you question a man's integrity, you can expect a fight.”²²

Another lesson Mandela learnt in his childhood was from observing the acting regent of the Thembu people in his court during their tribal meetings. He writes: “As a leader, I have always followed the principles I first saw demonstrated by the regent at the Great Place. I have always endeavoured to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes, my own opinion will simply represent a consensus of what I heard in the discussion. I always remember the regent's axiom: a leader, he said, is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go on ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realising that all along they are being directed from behind.”²³

At the acting regent's residence chiefs and headmen of various villages came to settle disputes and try cases. At times Mandela heard them speak of the great African patriots who fought against Western domination. Mandela notes, “My imagination was fired by the glory of these African warriors.”²⁴ The eldest of the chiefs was Chief Joyi. Writes Mandela: “Chief Joyi's war stories and his indictment of the British made me feel angry and cheated, as though I had already been robbed of my own birthright. Chief Joyi said that the African people lived in relative peace until the coming of the *abelungu*, the white people, who arrived from across the sea with fire-breathing weapons. Once, he said, the Thembu, the Pondo, the Xhosa, and

19. See Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 7.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

the Zulu were all children of one father, and lived as brothers.”²⁵

While growing up Mandela noticed there was a rivalry between his Xhosa tribe, and the amaMfengu. The latter were industrious, more educated because of their contact with Europeans and wealthier. They were the first to become Christians thus confirming the missionaries’ axiom, that to be Christian was to be civilised and to be civilised was to be Christian. Mandela writes: “At that stage, I did not witness nor even suspect the violent tribal rivalries that would subsequently be promoted by the white rulers of South Africa.”²⁶

At the age of seven Mandela was sent to school. On the first day of school his teacher gave him an English name. Mandela writes: “This was the custom among Africans in those days . . . The education I received was a British education, in which British ideas, British culture and British institutions were automatically assumed to be superior. There was no such thing as African culture.”²⁷

On African culture Mandela writes how he would return home after his games for supper and his father would narrate stories of historic battles and heroic Xhosa warriors, whilst his mother would enchant him with Xhosa legends and fables that had come down from numberless generations. These tales stimulated Mandela’s imagination and usually contained some moral lesson. An important aspect of African culture was the family bonding. Mandela writes: “My mother presided over three huts at Qunu, which, as I remember, were always filled with the babies and children of my relations. In fact, I hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one’s aunts or uncles are considered brother’s and sisters, not cousins. We do not make the same distinctions among relations practised by whites. We have no half-brothers or half-sisters. My mother’s sister is my mother; my uncle’s son is my brother; my brother’s child is my son, my daughter.”²⁸

Mandela’s school and college education was quite privileged. At school Mandela became friendly with a girl of whom he writes: “She was an extraordinarily clever and gifted person, whose potential was limited because of her family’s meagre resources. This was an all too typical South African story. It was not lack of ability that limited my people, but lack of opportunity.”²⁹ Elsewhere Mandela states: “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor.”³⁰ Less than half of African children attended school and only a tiny number completed high school. Africans were trained to be menial workers, to be in perpetual subordination to the white man. Except for

25. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

a very few, Africans were not allowed ownership of land but instead paid annual rent to the government as tenants.

In college he writes how English culture was imposed upon the blacks: “The educated Englishman was our model; what we aspired to be were ‘black Englishmen’, as we were sometimes derisively called. We were taught — and believed — that the best ideas were English ideas, the best government was English government and the best men were Englishmen.”³¹

Mandela also writes: “In those days, a black man with a BA was expected to scrape before a white man with a primary school education. No matter how high a black man advanced, he was still considered inferior to the lowest white man.”³² Mandela adds, “It was quite common for any white person to call on any black person to perform a chore.”³³

At Fort Hare college, Mandela’s perspective of the world broadened. His affable Zoology teacher was married to a Xhosa girl though he was from another tribe. Inter-marriages between tribes were rare and such unions were considered a taboo. After seeing this couple Mandela started losing his parochialism and began to sense an identity as an African, not just a Thembu, or even a Xhosa.

Mandela’s first brush with the authorities came during his final year in University. According to the University constitution, the students elected six members to the Students Representation Council (SRC). Shortly before the elections at a meeting of all the students the majority voted to boycott the elections unless the authorities improved the food at the University. When the scheduled voting took place the majority of students boycotted the election and only about a sixth voted. Of the six members elected, one was Mandela. But he resigned on the ground that he supported the boycott and did not enjoy support of the majority. Though initially all the six members had resigned finally he was the only one of the six who stood firm in his resignation. The following day the principal warned Mandela that if he did not withdraw his resignation he would be compelled to expel him from college. Expulsion would have sabotaged Mandela’s academic career and brought about serious financial consequences for his career. However, on a matter of principle, he stuck to his guns. The principal gave him a counter-offer and said that he could return to Fort Hare next year provided he joined the SRC and he had the whole of summer to consider it. Mandela reminisces: “I knew it was foolhardy for me to leave Fort Hare, but at the moment when I needed to compromise, I simply could not do so. Something inside me would not let me.” He added, “I resented his absolute power over my fate. I should have had the right to resign from the SRC if I wished. The injustice rankled.”³⁴ Decades later, Mandela called the episode — his refusal to

31. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

yield on a minor point of principle — “foolhardy.”³⁵

The acting Regent was furious that Mandela had left Fort Hare and ordered him to rejoin and meanwhile arranged the marriage of his son and also Mandela's at the same time. As per Thembu law and custom the Regent had the right to do so and Mandela could not refuse. In order to save themselves from the marriage he and the acting Regent's son, who was actually his cousin, ran away from home. After a couple of fortuitous escapades they reached Johannesburg. It was the year 1941, and Mandela was just 23 years old. Johannesburg had been built up around the discovery of gold in 1886. It was the city of opportunity but also of danger.

His first job in 1941 was as a security guard in a gold mine. Mandela now wanted to complete his University and earn his BA degree and had ambitions to become a lawyer. A cousin got him introduced to Walter Sisulu who was becoming prominent both as a businessman and a local leader. Sisulu directed him to a forward-looking white lawyer, Lazar Sidelsky who agreed to hire Mandela as a legal clerk in the law firm Witkin, Edelman and Sidelsky while he completed his BA degree. To qualify as an attorney in South Africa one had to undergo several years of apprenticeship besides studying law and passing exams. It was almost unheard of that an African would be taken on as an articled clerk. Sidelsky was a Jew in his mid-thirties who treated Mandela with enormous kindness and whom Mandela got to respect greatly. Mandela observed that he found Jews more broad-minded than most whites on issues of race and politics, perhaps because historically they themselves have been the victims of prejudice.

At the law firm there was another African employee, Gaur Radebe, ten years senior to Mandela, who was confident and held strong views. The first morning at the firm Mandela was told that there was no colour bar in the firm and the two Africans were to have their tea with the secretaries in 'two new cups'. Mandela knew that the 'two new cups' was evidence that a colour bar did exist. The secretaries were willing to share tea with the two Africans, but not cups from which to drink it. When tea-time arrived, Radebe, in front of the secretaries and other members of the firm, went over to the tea tray, selected one of the old cups instead one of the two new ones, and stood drinking his tea in a self-satisfied way. He then nodded to Mandela, as if to say it is your turn. The secretaries stared at Radebe. Mandela was in a quandary as he did not want to offend the secretaries nor alienate Radebe. He diplomatically declined the tea.

A few days later a more experienced Mandela was dictating some information to a white secretary when a known white client walked in. She was embarrassed and stiffly sent Mandela for a personal chore. Mandela complied. Mandela was becoming aware of the history of racial oppression.

35. <http://www.nytimes.com>.

Mandela's days as an apprentice were hard, as for the first time he faced poverty — his stipend barely covered his living expenses and his fees for the correspondence degree course. He writes: "Part of my salary was spent on an even more vital item — candles — for without them I could not study. I could not afford a paraffin lamp; candles allowed me to read late into the night. I was inevitably short of more than a few pence each month. On many days I walked the six miles to town in the morning and six back in the evening in order to save the bus fare. I often went days without more than a mouthful of food and without a change of clothing."³⁶

Mandela reminisces, "I was very backward in those days." He was embarrassed by his poverty. "Yet," he writes, "poverty often brings out the true generosity in others." He adds: "There is little to be said in favour of poverty, but it was often an incubator of true friendship."³⁷

Mandela lived in one of the non-European townships, a prison-like compound of a few thousand matchbox houses on treeless ground. Urban life tended to dilute tribe distinctions and created a solidarity amongst the Africans. This caused concern to the white government since they had always deployed divide-and-rule tactics when dealing with Africans.

In Johannesburg Mandela was separated from his family. But he was gradually adjusting to town life, developing the confidence and self-reliance to stand on his own two feet.

In 1943 Mandela enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand for a bachelor of law degree, the preparatory academic training for a lawyer. Here Mandela formed friendships with many white and Indian students. Now a new world opened to him, a world of ideas, political beliefs and debates. There were young white and Indian intellectuals who were prepared, despite their relative privilege, to sacrifice themselves for the cause of the oppressed. He completed his BA from the University of South Africa.

Speaking of the racial discrimination at that time Mandela writes:

An African child is born in an Africans Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an Africans Only area and attends Africans Only schools, if he attends schools at all.

When he grows up, he can only hold Africans Only jobs, rent a house in Africans Only townships, ride Africans Only trains and be stopped at any time of the day or night and be ordered to produce a pass, without which he can be arrested and thrown in jail. His life is circumscribed by racist laws and regulations that cripple his growth, dim his potential and stunt his life.

36. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 90.

37. See *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

. . . a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities and a thousand unremembered moments produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people.³⁸

The white government was guilty of several blatant exploitative and oppressive measures starting with the 1913 Land Act which ultimately deprived blacks of 87 per cent of the territory in the land of their birth; the Urban Areas Act of 1923 which created teeming African slums in order to supply cheap labour to white industry; the Colour Bar Act of 1926, which banned Africans from practising skilled trades; the Native Administration Act of 1927, which made the British Crown, rather than the Paramount Chiefs, the supreme chief over all African areas; and finally the Representation of Natives Act of 1936 which removed Africans from the common voters' roll thereby shattering any illusion that whites would allow Africans to have control over their own destiny.

Entering Politics

The one thing that turned Mandela into a revolutionary was the pernicious system of racial oppression he experienced as a young man in Johannesburg. When people spat on him in buses, when shopkeepers turned him away, when whites treated him as if he could not read or write — that changed him irrevocably. For deep in his bones was a basic sense of fairness: he simply could not tolerate injustice. One must remember that the tall, handsome and educated Mandela was the son of a Thembu chief and he had his sense of dignity. In 1943 Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) since he felt that it was the means to effect change in South Africa and fulfil black hopes and aspirations. Shortly after, impatient with the moderate approach of the ANC, Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and other militants created, in 1944, the ANC Youth League, issuing a more radical manifesto as a way to secure their freedom. Mandela was elected to its Executive Committee and by his own admission, was unsure of his political commitment as he was working full-time and studying part-time. Until 1947 Mandela's sacrifices had not gone much further than returning home late in the evening and being absent from his wife and family during weekends. Of the Youth League Mandela states: "African nationalism was our battle cry, and our creed was the creation of one nation out of many tribes, the overthrow of white supremacy, and the establishment of a truly democratic form of government."³⁹

Mandela was a man of action, and by now a man of audacious self-confidence. Joe Matthews, who worked for Mandela in the Youth League and

38. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

predicted that he would be the first president of a free South Africa said, “He was not a theoretician, but he was a doer. He was a man who did things, and he was always ready to volunteer to be the first to do any dangerous or difficult thing.” Walter Sisulu was of the opinion that Mandela was never “an extreme nationalist”, or much of an ideologue of any stripe; he was a man of action.⁴⁰

Another of Mandela’s strengths was his power of persuasion. “His starting point is that ‘I am going to persuade this person no matter what’”, Walter Sisulu said. “That is his gift. He will go to anybody, anywhere, with that confidence. Even when he does not have a strong case, he convinces himself that he has.”⁴¹

Mandela married his first wife, Evelyn Mase, in 1944. They were divorced in 1958 after having four children.

In 1946 the government curtailed the free movement of Indians, restricted their right to trade and buy and sell property. The Indian community was outraged and launched a concerted two-year campaign to oppose the measures that impressed the ANC and Mandela. He writes:

If I had once questioned the willingness of the Indian community to protest against oppression, I no longer could.

The Indian campaign became a model for the type of protest that we in the Youth League were calling for. It instilled a spirit of defiance and radicalism among the people, broke the fear of prison, and boosted the popularity and influence of the NIC (Natal Indian Congress) and TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress). They reminded us that the freedom struggle was not merely a question of making speeches, holding meetings, passing resolutions and sending deputations, but of meticulous organisation, militant mass action and above all, the willingness to suffer and sacrifice. The Indians’ campaign harkened back to the 1913 passive resistance campaign in which Mahatma Gandhi led a tumultuous procession of Indians crossing illegally from Natal to the Transvaal. That was history; this campaign was taking place before my own eyes.⁴²

The NIC and TIC’s initiative which impressed Mandela was similar to the ideas expressed in *Indu Prakash*, written in 1893 by a twenty-one-year-old Sri Aurobindo where he “vehemently denounced the then congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness.”⁴³

In the white general election of 1948 the extreme right wing National Party, who campaigned on the twin slogans of ‘nigger in his place’ and ‘the coolies (Indians)

40. See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?

41. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/world/africa/nelson-mandela_obit.html?

42. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 119.

43. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 51.

out of the country' won. The Nationalists were bitter towards the African as they believed they were threatening the prosperity and purity of Afrikaner (Dutch settlers) culture. The Nationalist's platform was apartheid. Apartheid was a new term but an old idea. It literally means apartness and was an oppressive system of laws that kept Africans in an inferior position to whites for centuries. What had been more or less *de facto* was to become relentlessly *de jure*. During their tenure the Nationalist government committed numerous harsh oppressive acts.

In 1949, five years after forming the Youth League, the Youth League members who had graduated into senior positions of the ANC guided it to a more radical and revolutionary path and called for boycotts, strikes, etc. ignoring the earlier ANC policy to keep its activities within the law.

Early in 1950 Mandela was appointed into the National Executive Committee of the ANC. On 26 June 1950 ANC had its first country-wide political strike against the government's murder of eighteen Africans on 1 May. Mass action was a criminal offence and perilous, for a striking African worker stood to lose not only his job but his entire livelihood. The protest was a moderate success and Mandela exults: "It was the first time I had taken a significant part in a national campaign, and I felt the exhilaration that springs from the success of a well-planned battle against the enemy and the sense of comradeship that is born of fighting against formidable odds. The struggle, I was learning, was all-consuming. A man involved in the struggle was a man without a home life."⁴⁴

In 1951 Mandela became the national president of the Youth League. In 1952 ANC and the SAIC (South African Indian Congress) launched a Defiance Campaign of mass civil disobedience which lasted for five months where hundreds were arrested. Mandela and twenty others were sentenced to 9 months' imprisonment with hard labour. Terming the civil disobedience campaign a threat and a crime the government in response empowered itself to declare martial law and to detain people without trial. The government also resorted to banning any individual. Mandela writes: "To ban a person, the government required no proof, offered no charges . . . It was a strategy designed to remove the individual from the struggle, allowing him to live a narrowly defined life outside politics. To violate or ignore a banning order was to invite imprisonment."⁴⁵

The Defiance Campaign marked a new chapter in the struggle. Several activists had gone to jail, a significant achievement, for fear of prison is a tremendous obstacle to a liberation struggle. From now on going to prison became a badge of honour among Africans. The campaign could not sustain itself as there was little participation from the countryside. Mandela notes: "I nevertheless felt a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction: I had been engaged in a just cause and had the strength to

44. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 136.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

fight for it and win. The campaign freed me from any lingering sense of doubt or inferiority I might still have felt; it liberated me from the feeling of being overwhelmed from the power and seeming invincibility of the white man and his institutions. But now the white man had felt the power of my punches and I could walk upright like a man, and look everyone in the eye with the dignity that comes from not having succumbed to oppression and fear. I had come of age as a freedom fighter.”⁴⁶

In 1952 Mandela was appointed as the first deputy president of the ANC. At around the same time Mandela was banned from attending any meetings or gatherings — political or otherwise — for six months; he was prohibited from talking to more than one person at a time and so was unable to attend his son’s birthday party. Also, he was not permitted to leave Johannesburg district. This was the first of a series of bans on him. “Banning not only confines one physically, it imprisons one’s spirit. It induces a kind of claustrophobia that makes one yearn not only for freedom of movement but spiritual escape,” writes Mandela, “the insidious effects of bans was that at a certain point one began to think that the oppressor was not without but within.”⁴⁷ In 1956 Mandela was banned for the third time, which prohibited him from attending meetings and restricted him to Johannesburg for five years.

Mandela qualified as a lawyer and in 1952 opened his own law office in Johannesburg — South Africa’s first black law firm. Soon after, he formed a partnership with Oliver Tambo. Mandela had been outraged that most law firms charged the Africans higher fees than the far wealthier white clients. He notes:

For Africans, we were the firm of first choice and last resort. To reach our offices each morning, we had to move through a crowd of people in the corridors, on the stairs and in our small waiting room.

Africans were desperate for legal help in government buildings: it was a crime to walk through a Whites Only door, a crime to ride a Whites Only bus, a crime to use a Whites Only drinking fountain, a crime to walk on a Whites Only beach, a crime to be on the streets after 11 p.m., a crime not to have a pass book and a crime to have the wrong signature in that book, a crime to be unemployed and a crime to be employed in the wrong place, a crime to live in certain places and a crime to have no place to live.⁴⁸

Oliver Tambo had a phenomenal capacity for work. He identified with the masses and spent a great deal of time with each client. He had limitless compassion and patience; a quality that Mandela imbibed. Every week they interviewed men

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

who were evicted from their land or houses in which they were living for generations or decades. Everyday they heard the humiliations that Africans constantly had to face. As regards prison brutality the police were clever enough to detain a prisoner long enough for the wounds to heal and the magistrates sided with the police. The coroner's verdict regarding the time in police custody would often read 'Death due to multiple causes.'

As they pursued their careers as attorneys, both knew they could never become prosecutor, magistrate or judge. However, within a year the authorities attempted to put them out of business by shifting them out of their business premises in the city and locating them miles away, virtually unreachable for their clients.

In December 1956 scores of anti-apartheid leaders — Africans, Indians and Coloureds — including Mandela were arrested on charges of conspiracy to use violence to overthrow the government. This lengthy court case was known as the Treason Trial of 1956. The charges were dropped after a four-year trial. While they were under-trial prisoners Mandela commented on the prison conditions: "It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones — and South Africa treated its imprisoned African citizens like animals."⁴⁹

The Treason Trial had seriously affected Mandela's law practice as he was hardly able to attend office. As a result he went through grave financial difficulties.

In 1958, Mandela married Winnie Madikizela, who was later to play an active role in the campaign to free her husband from prison. They had two daughters.

Resistance to apartheid grew, mainly against the new pass laws, which dictated where black people were allowed to live and work. In a protest in March 1960 against the pass laws in Sharpeville 69 black people were shot dead and four hundred wounded by police. On 8 April the government declared the country's first state of emergency and banned the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Being a member of the ANC was punishable by a jail term of up to ten years. Mandela and his colleagues went underground and started attending secret meetings to organise resistance against the state. A warrant for his arrest was issued in absentia.

South African journalist, Benjamin Pogrund, writes of the days Mandela had gone underground: "The ANC and the rival Pan Africanist Congress — whose call for action had precipitated Sharpeville — were banned and the government began to seize and imprison the leaders. Mandela went underground and started to plan a stay-at-home strike against the government for May 1961. The entire police force hunted him. He eluded them. He was known as the Black Pimpernel. I already knew Mandela because I was reporting black politics for the then *Rand Daily Mail* in Johannesburg. We set up secret meetings by sending messages through trusted people. We did not discuss great political principles but dealt with the problems and

49. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

challenges he was dealing with every day. I was deeply impressed. There was purpose and determination in him. I was conscious that he had deliberately walked away from a comfortable and secure life at a level to which very few black people could have aspired at that time. He was leaving behind Winnie and their two young daughters and putting his life on the line. There was never a single word of complaint or regret.”⁵⁰

In 1961 Mandela single-handedly pushed and passed the resolution for the ANC to commence an armed struggle. His premise was “that non-violence was a tactic that should be abandoned when it no longer worked.”⁵¹ After some resistance from the ANC elders Mandela’s militant ideology was accepted and he was given the task of assembling an army. The name of this new organisation was MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe, or Spear of the Nation) and its mandate was to wage acts of violence against the state in order to start a revolution.

Mandela studied the history of armed warfare, particularly guerrilla warfare. On 16 December 1961 the MK exploded bombs at electric power stations and government offices in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban. Another set of explosions soon followed on New Year’s Eve. Mandela had limited MK’s policy to sabotage but felt if it did not have the desired effect then he would probably engage in guerrilla warfare.

In January 1962, Mandela secretly left South Africa. He travelled around Africa and visited England to gain support for the armed struggle. He received military training in Morocco and Ethiopia and returned to South Africa in July 1962.

Sri Aurobindo’s view of an armed insurrection is of significant interest. He says that of the “three sides to Sri Aurobindo’s political ideas and activities”, the first

was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. . . .⁵²

It is interesting to note how Mandela compared the South African freedom struggle with the Indian one. He said: “In India, Gandhi had been dealing with a foreign power that ultimately was more realistic and far-sighted. That was not the case with the Afrikaaners in South Africa. Non-violent passive resistance is effective as long as your opposition adheres to the same rules as you do. But if peaceful protest is met with violence, its efficacy is at an end. For me, non-violence was not

50. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/06/nelson-mandela-remembered-south-africa>.

51. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 322.

52. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 47.

53. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 183.

a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon.”⁵³

Alluding to passive resistance and violence as means in the Indian independence struggle Sri Aurobindo has written:

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of Non-violence or pacific idealism. . . . Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations.⁵⁴

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

54. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 47-48.

As for facts each mind always arranges them in its own way. It is a well-known phenomenon which psychologists constantly emphasise that each mind arranges facts according to its own impressions, predilections, convenience and, while this may be partly done with a conscious twist, conscious omissions and additions, it is quite or as often and more often done without any wilful intentions and by a sort of subconscious selection in the mental hinterland. That is why no three witnesses of an incident can give the same account of it — unless of course they have talked it over together — each tells a different story.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – IV, CWSA, Vol. 31, p. 25)



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