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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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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXI

No. 5

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

THE COSMIC MAN (Poem)	...	7
THE SPIRIT OF HINDUISM	...	8
SVARĀṬ AND SAMRĀṬ	...	11
ADDRESS AT THE BARODA COLLEGE SOCIAL GATHERING	...	12
THE CENTURY OF LIFE (Translation of Bhartrihari)	...	15

The Mother

‘AT THE CORE OF ALL THAT IS . . .’	...	20
SURRENDER AND SACRIFICE	...	21

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

SRI AUROBINDO, OTHER TEACHINGS, THE BUILDING OF AUROVILLE	...	26
---	-----	----

P. B. Saint-Hilaire and Gabriel Monod-Herzen

THE MESSAGE OF SRI AUROBINDO . . . AND HIS ASHRAM	...	29
---	-----	----

Vikas (Alan Vickers)

ALL THE BIRDS OF OXFORDSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE	...	49
--	-----	----

A Compilation

A NEW EDUCATION FOR A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS	...	62
---	-----	----

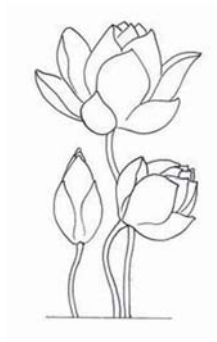
THE COSMIC MAN

I look across the world and no horizon walls my gaze;
I see Tokio and Paris and New York,
I see the bombs bursting on Barcelona and on Canton streets.
Man's numberless misdeeds and small good deeds take place
within my single self;

I am the beast he slays, the bird he feeds and saves;
The thoughts of unknown minds exalt me with their thrill;
I carry the sorrow of millions in my lonely breast.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 637)



THE SPIRIT OF HINDUISM

GOD

OM *ityetad akṣaram idam sarvam*; OM is the syllable, OM is the Universe; all that was, all that is, all that will be is OM. With this pregnant confession of faith Hinduism begins its interpretation of the Universe.

Metaphysical systems arise and metaphysical systems fall; Hegel disappears and Kant arrives; Pantheism, Theism, Atheism pursue their interminable round, and there is no finality. Then Science comes and declares the whole vanity, for all is physical and there is nothing metaphysical save in the brain of the dreamer; and yet tho' Science has spoken still there is no finality. For the soul of man refuses to be dissolved into a force or a procession of sensations or a composite effect created by the action of outward things on the neurons of the brain. It persists in saying "I am"; it persists in demanding an explanation of its existence, and will not be satisfied without an answer. But where is that answer to come from or how is it possible to arrive at any conclusion? The rock on which all metaphysics come to shipwreck is the same unsurpassable barrier before which Science itself becomes a baffled and impotent thing; it is that behind everything, beyond everything, when all knowledge has been acquired, when matter has been pursued into its subtlest unanalysable element, there is always an Inexplicable Something which remains. Metaphysics seeks to tell us What the Universe is and Why it is; in other words to explain the Inexplicable; but the end of this process is inevitably a juggling with words which must repel all clear-minded thinkers. At the end of all metaphysical systems we find an enthroned word which appavelled in the purple of finality professes to explain the Universe, and yet when we look into it, we find that it stands itself in need of explanation, that it is merely a Word which stands for the Inexplicable. Science avoids the difficulty by professing that the ultimate results of its analysis are a sufficient description of the Universe, a sufficient answer to the What, and as to the Why it rests in the great fact of Evolution. Again we find that we have landed ourselves in unexplained words beyond which lies the same region of darkness involved in yet deeper darkness; the *tamas tamasā gūḍham* of the Scriptures; Evolution, Force, Kinesis, these are words in which we gather up our observation of certain phenomena; they are the sum of the workings of a nameless, unintelligible Thing, but what that Thing is and why It is, remains an unsolved mystery. Whether it is that the human mind is intrinsically unable to pierce beyond the veil or whether it has the power latent or potential but as yet unevolved, we may at least safely assert that so far man has not been able to understand Finality; he is constitutionally incapable of imagining a Final Cause which his reason when faithfully interrogated will not refuse to accept as Final, will not be forced by its own nature to subject to the query How & Why. There are only two ways of meeting the difficulty; one is to assert that the reason of

man as at present constituted is imperfect and by reason of its imperfection unable to grasp Finality which for all that exists; the other is to assert that the reason of man is right and that Finality is inconceivable because it does not exist. The latter is the answer which Hinduism has selected; the human mind cannot arrive at anything final because there is nothing final, for all the universe is OM and OM is Infinite, without beginning and without end either in Time or in Space. It has indeed been advanced that the human mind can realise only the Finite and not the Infinite, — a sorry paradox, for it is truer to say that the only fact which the human mind can realise is Infinity; the Finite it grasps only as a phenomenon, the very conception of which depends on the wider conception of the Infinite. A finite thing, such as a house, we conceive as a limited phenomenon in relation to that which is not the house; limit is only imaginable in relation to something beyond the limit; a final limit to everything is unimaginable whether in Time or Space. Outside the house is the province and outside the limits of the province is the country and outside the limits of the country is the earth and outside the limits of the earth is the Universe and to the Universe we can only imagine limits if we imagine it as surrounded by other Universes, and so the mind of man goes travelling forward & ever forward without reaching an end. Having realised that there is no end the Mind refuses to proceed farther and returns on its traces into the world of phenomena. It is this refusal, this return which is meant when it is stated that the human mind cannot conceive Infinity. And yet what does the statement amount to? Simply to this that there is no end to the Infinite, in other words that the Infinite *is* infinite, that the boundless *has* no bound. The human mind works within limits, that is to say, within the Absolute apparently conditioned by phenomena because it is itself the Absolute apparently conditioned by phenomena. This fundamental idea of the Vedanta I shall have occasion to return upon in its proper place; here I follow out the argument so far in order to establish that the working of the human mind within limits does not militate against the undoubted experience that if rigidly interrogated it realises phenomena only as phenomena and the only fact to which it can give assent is the fact of infinity. If therefore we take reason or mental Experience as the final authority, the Hindu proposition demonstrates itself. The alternative proposition like the Roman Curia calls upon us to put reason out of Court and makes discussion of the question impossible. Although one cannot dogmatically declare it to be untrue, it is certainly contrary to all scientific probability; Hinduism does not deny, but rather asserts that the powers of the human mind can & will enlarge indefinitely, but it believes that this will be by the process of development, not by a radical alteration of its essential nature. To assert that man must believe in finality although he is constitutionally unable to grasp any finality, is to leave the terra firma on which all thought moves & reposes, the collective mental experience of the race affecting & affected by the mental experience of each individual and to launch into the void of dogmatic & irrational belief. *Credo quia incredibile est*, I believe because it is incomprehensible.

We come back therefore to the Hindu confession of faith, OM is the syllable, OM is the Universe; the past, the present and the future, — all that was, all that is, all that will be is OM. Likewise all that may exist beyond the bounds of Time, that too is OM.

Mark the determination to drive the idea of Infinity to its logical conclusion. *All that may exist beyond the bounds of Time, that too is OM.* Man can conceive nothing that is neither in the past, present nor future, but if there be such inconceivable thing, it does not by becoming beyond Time place itself beyond OM. That too is OM. In a similar spirit another verse of the Upanishad declares of God “He moves & He moveth not, He is near & He is far, He is within the Universe and He is outside the Universe.” The Universe is all that exists, all that Man can know or conceive & there can be nothing outside it because it has no limits; but if there does exist such inconceivable thing as is beyond illimitable Space it does not by becoming beyond Space, put itself beyond OM. *He is within the Universe and He is outside the Universe.* All Hindu Scripture is precise upon this point, our God is not a gigantic polypus, not a term for infinite & Eternal Matter, not a stream of Tendency that makes for righteousness, or for the survival of the fittest, or for the goal of Evolution, whatever that may be. He is the Infinite and the Absolute, and what seems to be finite and conditioned, seems & is not; is phenomenon & not fact. God is the only fact, God is the only reality; God is the One than whom there is no other. He alone exists, all else appears. But of these things later. At present the conclusion which I wish to present is this that there is an Infinite who is the one fact; there is no Final Cause, because Final Cause implies an Effect different from itself & must therefore be finite, but the human mind cannot conceive of anything ultimate & finite; for there is no such thing; it cannot conceive of a beginning to all things because there was no beginning, or an end to all things because there is no end. There is only One Infinite who is without beginning and without End.

But if He is Infinite, He must be Unknowable, for knowledge implies limit & division. The human mind as has been said, works within limits; in order to know, we must define and analyse; but definition and analysis imply limits, imply conditions. The Infinite is conceivable to us, but not being measurable, it is also not knowable. This is the second great philosophical truth on which Hinduism insists. OM *tat sat* is its formula, OM, That is what Is. “That”, the most non-committing expression discoverable in the language, is the one selected to express the idea of the Infinite One. “That is the one thing that is”, but *what* That is and *why* That is, lies beyond the scope of our knowledge. Again and again the Scriptures asseverate our ultimate ignorance.¹

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 340-44)

1. *The notes that follow were written by Sri Aurobindo at the top of the last page of this manuscript:*

Infinite, therefore Unknowable, Unknowable therefore Absolute. Prove the Existence of God. Known by Becoming.

SVARĀṬ AND SAMRĀṬ

The witness Purusha in the mind observes that the inadequacy of his effort, all the inadequacy in fact of man's life and nature arises from the separation and the consequent struggle, want of knowledge, want of harmony, want of oneness. It is essential for him to grow out of separative individuality, to universalise himself, to make himself one with the universe. This unification can be done only through the soul by making our soul of mind one with the universal Mind, our soul of life one with the universal Life-soul, our soul of body one with the universal soul of physical Nature. When this can be done, in proportion to the power, intensity, depth, completeness, permanence with which it can be done, great effects are produced upon the natural action. Especially there grows an immediate and profound sympathy and immixture of mind with mind, life with life, a lessening of the body's insistence on separateness, a power of direct mental and other intercommunication and effective mutual action which helps out now the inadequate indirect communication and action that was till now the greater part of the conscious means used by embodied mind. But still the Purusha sees that in mental, vital, physical nature, taken by itself, there is always a defect, inadequacy, confused action, due to the mechanically unequal interplay of the three modes or gunas of Nature. To transcend it he has in the universality too to rise to the supramental and spiritual, to be one with the supramental soul of cosmos, the universal spirit. He arrives at the larger light and order of a higher principle in himself and the universe which is the characteristic action of the divine Sachchidananda. Even, he is able to impose the influence of that light and order, not only on his own natural being, but, within the radius and to the extent of the Spirit's action in him, on the world he lives in, on that which is around him. He is *svarāṭ*, self-knower, self-ruler, but he begins to be also through this spiritual oneness and transcendence *samrāṭ*, a knower and master of his environing world of being.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 641)

ADDRESS AT THE BARODA COLLEGE SOCIAL GATHERING

(Delivered in Baroda on 22 July 1899.

Text published in the Baroda College Miscellany, September 1899.)

In addressing you on an occasion like the present, it is inevitable that the mind should dwell on one feature of this gathering above all others. Held as it is towards the close of the year, I am inevitably reminded that many of its prominent members are with us for the last time in their College life, and I am led to speculate with both hope and anxiety on their future careers, and this not only because several familiar faces are to disappear from us and scatter into different parts of the country and various walks of life, but also because they go out from us as our finished work, and it is by their character and life that our efforts will be judged. When I say, our efforts, I allude not merely to the professorial work of teaching, not to book-learning only, but to the entire activity of the College as a great and complex educational force, which is not solely meant to impart information, but to bring out or give opportunities for bringing out all the various intellectual and other energies which go to make up a man. And here is the side of collegiate institutions of which this Social Gathering especially reminds us, the force of the social life it provides in moulding the character and the mind. I think it will not be out of place, if in dwelling on this I revert to the great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge which are our famous exemplars, and point out a few differences between those Universities and our own and the thoughts those differences may well suggest.

I think there is no student of Oxford or Cambridge who does not look back in after days on the few years of his undergraduate life as, of all the scenes he has moved in, that which calls up the happiest memories, and it is not surprising that this should be so, when we remember what that life must have meant to him. He goes up from the restricted life of his home and school and finds himself in surroundings which with astonishing rapidity expand his intellect, strengthen his character, develop his social faculties, force out all his abilities and turn him in three years from a boy into a man. His mind ripens in the contact with minds which meet from all parts of the country and have been brought up in many various kinds of trainings, his unwholesome eccentricities wear away and the unsocial, egoistic elements of character are to a large extent discouraged. He moves among ancient and venerable buildings, the mere age and beauty of which are in themselves an education. He has the Union which has trained so many great orators and debaters, has been the first trial ground of so many renowned intellects. He has, too, the athletics clubs organized with a perfection unparalleled elsewhere, in which, if he

has the physique and the desire for them he may find pursuits which are also in themselves an education. The result is that he who entered the University a raw student, comes out of it a man and a gentleman, accustomed to think of great affairs and fit to move in cultivated society, and he remembers his College and University with affection, and in after days if he meets with those who have studied with him he feels attracted towards them as to men with whom he has a natural brotherhood. This is the social effect I should like the Colleges and Universities of India also to exercise, to educate by social influences as well as those which are merely academical and to create the feeling among their pupils that they belong to the community, that they are children of one mother. There are many obstacles to this result in the circumstances of Indian Universities. The Colleges are not collected in one town but are scattered among many and cannot assemble within themselves so large and various a life. They are new also, the creation of not more than fifty years — and fifty years is a short period in the life of a University. But so far as circumstances allow, there is an attempt to fill up the deficiency, in your Union, your Debating Club and Reading Room, your athletic sports and Social Gathering. For the success of this attempt time is needed, but your efforts are also needed: and I ask you who are soon to go out into the world, not to forget your College or regard it as a mere episode in your life, but rather as one to whose care you must look back and recompense it by your future life and work, and if you meet fellow-students, alumni of the same College, to meet them as friends, as brothers.

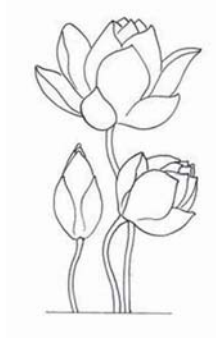
There is another point in which a wide difference exists. What makes Oxford and Cambridge not local institutions but great and historic Universities? It is the number of great and famous men, of brilliant intellects in every department which have issued from them. I should like you to think seriously of this aspect of the question also. In England the student feels a pride in his own University and College, wishes to see their traditions maintained, and tries to justify them to the world by his own success. This feeling has yet to grow up among us. And I would appeal to you — who are leaving us — to help to create it, to cherish it yourselves, to try and justify the College of its pupils. Of course, there is one preliminary method by which the students can add fame to their College. Success in examinations, though preliminary merely, and not an end in itself, is nevertheless of no small effect or importance. You all know how the recent success of an Indian student has filled the whole country with joy and enthusiasm. That success reflects fame not only on India but on his University and College, and when the name of the first Indian Senior Wrangler is mentioned, it will also be remembered that he belonged to Cambridge and to St. John's. But examinations, however important, are only a preliminary. I lay stress upon this because there is too much of a tendency in this country to regard education as a mere episode, finished when once the degree is obtained. But the University cannot and does not pretend to complete a man's education; it merely gives some materials to his hand or points out certain paths he

may tread, and it says to him, — “Here are the materials I have given into your hands, it is for you to make of them what you can;” or — “These are the paths I have equipped you to travel; it is yours to tread them to the end, and by your success in them justify me before the world.”

I would ask you therefore to remember these things in your future life, not to drop the effects of your College training as no longer necessary, but, to strive for eminence and greatness in your own lines, and by the brilliance of your names add lustre to the first nursing home of your capacities, to cherish its memory with affection as that which equipped your intellects, trained you into men, and strove to give you such social life as might fit you for the world. And finally I would ask you not to sever yourselves in after days from it, but if you are far, to welcome its alumni when you meet them with brotherly feelings and if you are near to keep up connection with it, not to regard the difference of age between yourselves and its future students but associate with them, be present at such occasions as this social gathering and evince by your acts your gratitude for all that it did for you in the past.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 353-56)



THE CENTURY OF LIFE

(Continued from the issue of April 2018)

The Nitishataka of Bhartrihari freely rendered into English verse

ON WISDOM

Poets and Princes

Unhonoured in a State when poets dwell
Whose fames range wider than its strong-winged birds,
Whose utterance is for grace adorable
Of chosen speech and art of noble words,
Whose wisdom hundreds come to hear and tell;
The world that nation's chief for dullness blames,
For poets without wealth are rich and kings:
When values low depreciate costly things,
'Tis the appraiser's shame and not the gem's.

True Wealth

Knowledge is truest wealth, not this which dies, —
It cherishes a strange deep peace within
Unutterably, nor the robber's eyes
Ever shall find it out; to give it is gain,
It then grows most when parted with, and poured
With sleepless hand fills gloriously its lord.
Worlds perish may, Knowledge survives their fall;
This wise men cherish; O Kings, your pride recall,
You have but wealth, they inner royalty
Of lordliest wisdom. Who with these shall vie?

The Man of Knowledge

Scorn not the man of knowledge to whose eyes
The secrets of the world have been revealed!

Thou canst not hold his spirit from the skies
 By fortune light nor all that earth can yield.
 The furious tusker with new dark rut stained
 Were sooner by a lotus-thread detained.

Fate and Wisdom

What can the extreme wrath of hostile Fate?
 The swan that floats in the cool lotus-wood
 She from his pleasant mansion can exclude.
 His fame remains, in food adulterate¹
 Who could the better choose, the worse discern.
 Fate cannot touch glory that mind can earn.

The Real Ornament

It is not armlets that adorn a man,
 Nor necklaces all crammed with moonbright pearls,
 Nor baths, nor ointments, nor arranged curls.
 'Tis art of excellent speech that only can
 Adorn him: jewels perish, garlands fade;
 This only abides and glitters undecayed.

The Praises of Knowledge

Knowledge is nobler beauty in a man
 Than features: 'tis his hidden hoard of price;
 This the long roll of Masters first began;
 Pleasure it brings, just fame and constant bliss,
 And is a helping friend in foreign lands,
 And is a very god with puissant hands.
 Knowledge, not wealth in great men is adored,
 Nor better than a beast the mind unstored.

1. The swan was supposed to have the power of separating milk from water, when the two were mixed.

Comparisons

Men cherish burning anger in their hearts,
 Yet look without to find if they have foes.
 Who sweet forbearance has, requires no arts
 Of speech; persuading silently he goes.

Why fear the snake when in thy kindness bask
 Men evil, or a fire while kinsmen jar
 Burning thy house! From heaven no medicines ask
 To heal a troubled mind, where true friends are.

Nor seek for ornaments, noble modest shame
 Being with thee, nor for wealth when wisdom's by.
 Who needs a kingdom when his mind can claim
 A golden realm in sweetest poetry?

Worldly Wisdom

Have mercy for all men, for thy own race
 Have kindness, for the cunning cunning have,
 Affection for the good, and politic ways
 For princes: for thy foes a spirit brave,
 Patience for elders, candour for the wise:
 Have skilful ways to steal out women's hearts.
 Who shine here, masters in these social arts,
 In them the human scheme deep-rooted lies.

Good Company

Company of good men is a very soil
 Of plenty, yielding all high things to man.
 The dull weight of stupidity it can
 Lift from the mind and cleanse of falsehood vile,
 Sprinkling truth's fragrance sweet upon the speech;
 And it can point out greatness' rising path,
 And drive out sinful lust and drive out wrath,
 And a calm gladness to the senses teach;
 Glory that to the very stars would climb,
 Can give thee, conquering thy heart and time.

The Conquests of Sovereign Poetry

Who are the conquerors? Not mere lords of land,
 But kingly poets, whose high victories
 Are perfect works; men's hearts at their command
 Are wholly; at their will the passions rise.
 Glory their body is, which Death's pale fear
 Afflicts not, nor abhorred Age comes near.

Rarities

Whatever most the soul on earth desires,
 Are rarities, as, a virtuous son; a wife
 Who wholly loves; Fortune that never tires;
 A friend whose sweet affection waters life;
 A master pleased; servants that ne'er deceive;
 A charming form; a mind no sorrows grieve;
 A mouth in wisdom proved that makes not strife.
 These to his favourites being pleased allows
 Hari, of whom the world grows amorous.

The Universal Religion

All varying Scriptures that the earth divide,
 Have yet one common rule that need o'erride
 Dogma nor rite, nor any creed offend;
 All to their heavens by one sole path intend.
 'Tis this: — Abstain from slaughter; others' wealth
 To covet cease, and in thy speech no stealth
 Of falsehood harbour; give in season due
 According to thy power; from ribald view
 Or word keep far of woman, wife or maid;
 Be mild obedience to thy elders paid;
 Dam longing like a river; each act beneath
 Show mercy and kindness to all things that breathe.

Great and Meaner Spirits

Some from high action through base fear refrain;
 The path is difficult, the way not plain.
 Others more noble to begin are stayed
 By a few failures. Great spirits undismayed
 Abandon never what once to do they swore.
 Baffled and beaten back they spring once more,
 Buffeted and borne down, rise up again
 And, full of wounds, come on like iron men.

The Narrow Way

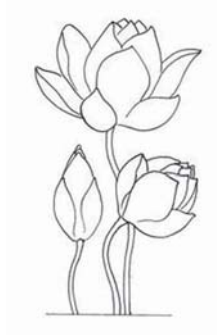
Kind to be, yet immutably be just;
 To find all baser act too hard to do, —
 Yea, though not doing shatter our life to dust; —
 Contempt that will not to the evil sue;
 Not to the friend that's poor our need to state;
 Baffled by fortune still erect to stand;
 Being small to tread in footprints of the great;
 Who for weak men such rugged path has planned,
 Harder to tread than edge of this sharp brand?

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated from the original Sanskrit)

(To be continued)

(Translations, CWSA Vol. 5, pp. 321-26)



‘AT THE CORE OF ALL THAT IS . . .’

June 12, 1914

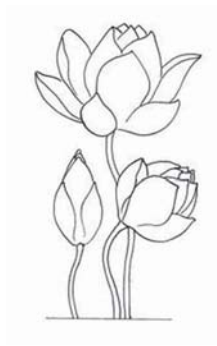
O my sweet Master, eternal splendour, I can only unite with Thee in silence and peace, saying that Thy Will may be done in every detail as in the whole. Take possession of Thy kingdom, master all that revolts against Thee, heal the souls who do not know Thee and the intellects that do not want to submit and be consecrated to Thee. Awaken our slumbering energies, stimulate our courage, enlighten us, O Lord, show us the Way.

My heart is overflowing with a sovereign peace, my thought is calm and silent.

At the core of all that is, of all that will be, of all that is not, is Thy divine and unchanging smile.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 170)



SURRENDER AND SACRIFICE

Is not surrender the same as sacrifice?

In our Yoga there is no room for sacrifice. But everything depends on the meaning you put on the word. In its pure sense it means a consecrated giving, a making sacred to the Divine. But in the significance that it now bears, sacrifice is something that works for destruction; it carries about it an atmosphere of negation. This kind of sacrifice is not fulfilment; it is a deprivation, a self-immolation. It is your possibilities that you sacrifice, the possibilities and realisations of your personality from the most material to the highest spiritual range. Sacrifice diminishes your being. If physically you sacrifice your life, your body, you give up all your possibilities on the material plane; you have done with the achievements of your earthly existence.

In the same way you can morally sacrifice your life; you give up the amplitude and free fulfilment of your inner existence. There is always in this idea of self-immolation a sense of forcing, a constriction, an imposed self-denial. This is an ideal that does not give room for the soul's deeper and larger spontaneities. By surrender we mean not this but a spontaneous self-giving, a giving of all your self to the Divine, to a greater Consciousness of which you are a part. Surrender will not diminish, but increase; it will not lessen or weaken or destroy your personality, it will fortify and aggrandise it. Surrender means a free total giving with all the delight of the giving; there is no sense of sacrifice in it. If you have the slightest feeling that you are making a sacrifice, then it is no longer surrender. For it means that you reserve yourself or that you are trying to give, with grudging or with pain and effort, and have not the joy of the gift, perhaps not even the feeling that you are giving. When you do anything with the sense of a compression of your being, be sure that you are doing it in the wrong way. True surrender enlarges you; it increases your capacity; it gives you a greater measure in quality and in quantity which you could not have had by yourself. This new greater measure of quality and quantity is different from anything you could attain before: you enter into another world, into a wideness which you could not have entered if you did not surrender. It is as when a drop of water falls into the sea; if it still kept there its separate identity, it would remain a little drop of water and nothing more, a little drop crushed by all the immensity around, because it has not surrendered. But, surrendering, it unites with the sea and participates in the nature and power and vastness of the whole sea.

There is no ambiguity or vagueness in the movement, it is clear and strong and definite. If a small human mind stands in front of the Divine Universal Mind and clings to its separateness, it will remain what it is, a small bounded thing, incapable

of knowing the nature of the higher reality or even of coming in contact with it. The two continue to stand apart and are, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, quite different from each other. But if the little human mind surrenders, it will be merged in the Divine Universal Mind; it will be one in quality and quantity with it; losing nothing but its own limitations and deformations, it will receive from it its vastness and luminous clearness. The small existence will change its nature; it will put on the nature of the greater truth to which it surrenders. But if it resists and fights, if it revolts against the Universal Mind, then a conflict and pressure are inevitable in which what is weak and small cannot fail to be drawn into that power and immensity. If it does not surrender, its only other possible fate is absorption and extinction. A human being, who comes into contact with the Divine Mind and surrenders, will find that his own mind begins at once to be purified of its obscurities and to share in the power and the knowledge of the Divine Universal Mind. If he stands in front, but separated, without any contact, he will remain what he is, a little drop of water in the measureless vastness. If he revolts, he will lose his mind; its powers will diminish and disappear. And what is true of the mind is true of all the other parts of the nature. It is as when you fight against one who is too strong for you — a broken head is all you gain. How can you fight something that is a million times stronger? Each time you revolt, you get a knock, and each blow takes away a portion of your strength, as when one who engages in a pugilistic encounter with a far superior rival receives blow after blow and each blow makes him weaker and weaker till he is knocked out. There is no necessity of a willed intervention, the action is automatic. Nothing else can happen if you dash yourself in revolt against the Immensity. As long as you remain in your corner and follow the course of the ordinary life, you are not touched or hurt; but once you come in contact with the Divine, there are only two ways open to you. You surrender and merge in it, and your surrender enlarges and glorifies you; or you revolt and all your possibilities are destroyed and your powers ebb away and are drawn from you into That which you oppose.

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. But to have this sublimating change, he must first give up all that, by distorting, limiting and obscuring the true nature, fetters and debases and disfigures the true personality;

he must throw from him whatever belongs to the ignorant lower movements of the ordinary man and his blind limping ordinary life. And first of all he must give up his desires; for desire is the most obscure and the most obscuring movement of the lower nature. Desires are motions of weakness and ignorance and they keep you chained to your weakness and to your ignorance. Men have the impression that their desires are born within; they feel as if they come out of themselves or arise within themselves; but it is a false impression. Desires are waves of the vast sea of the obscure lower nature and they pass from one person to another. Men do not generate a desire in themselves, but are invaded by these waves; whoever is open and without defence is caught in them and tossed about. Desire by engrossing and possessing him makes him incapable of any discrimination and gives him the impression that it is part of his nature to manifest it. In reality, it has nothing to do with his true nature. It is the same with all the lower impulses, jealousy or envy, hatred or violence. These too are movements that seize you, waves that overwhelm and invade; they deform, they do not belong to the true character or the true nature; they are no intrinsic or inseparable part of yourself, but come out of the sea of surrounding obscurity in which move the forces of the lower nature. These desires, these passions have no personality, there is nothing in them or their action that is peculiar to you; they manifest in the same way in everyone. The obscure movements of the mind too, the doubts and errors and difficulties that cloud the personality and diminish its expansion and fulfilment, come from the same source. They are passing waves and they catch anyone who is ready to be caught and utilised as their blind instrument. And yet each goes on believing that these movements are part of himself and a precious product of his own free personality. Even we find people clinging to them and their disabilities as the very sign or essence of what they call their freedom.

If you have understood this, you will be ready to understand the difference, the great difference between spirituality and morality, two things that are constantly confused with each other. The spiritual life, the life of Yoga, has for its object to grow into the divine consciousness and for its result to purify, intensify, glorify and perfect what is in you. It makes you a power for manifesting of the Divine; it raises the character of each personality to its full value and brings it to its maximum expression; for this is part of the Divine plan. Morality proceeds by a mental construction and, with a few ideas of what is good and what is not, sets up an ideal type into which all must force themselves. This moral ideal differs in its constituents and its ensemble at different times and different places. And yet it proclaims itself as a unique type, a categoric absolute; it admits of none other outside itself; it does not even admit a variation within itself. All are to be moulded according to its single ideal pattern, everybody is to be made uniformly and faultlessly the same. It is because morality is of this rigid unreal nature that it is in its principle and its working the contrary of the spiritual life. The spiritual life reveals the one essence in all, but reveals too its infinite diversity; it works for diversity in oneness and for perfection

in that diversity. Morality lifts up one artificial standard contrary to the variety of life and the freedom of the spirit. Creating something mental, fixed and limited, it asks all to conform to it. All must labour to acquire the same qualities and the same ideal nature. Morality is not divine or of the Divine; it is of man and human. Morality takes for its basic element a fixed division into the good and the bad; but this is an arbitrary notion. It takes things that are relative and tries to impose them as absolutes; for this good and this bad differ in differing climates and times, epochs and countries. The moral notion goes so far as to say that there are good desires and bad desires and calls on you to accept the one and reject the other. But the spiritual life demands that you should reject desire altogether. Its law is that you must cast aside all movements that draw you away from the Divine. You must reject them, not because they are bad in themselves, — for they may be good for another man or in another sphere, — but because they belong to the impulses or forces that, being unilluminated and ignorant, stand in the way of your approach to the Divine. All desires, whether good or bad, come within this description; for desire itself arises from an unilluminated vital being and its ignorance. On the other hand you must accept all movements that bring you into contact with the Divine. But you accept them, not because they are good in themselves, but because they bring you to the Divine. Accept then all that takes you to the Divine. Reject all that takes you away from it, but do not say that this is good and that is bad or try to impose your outlook on others; for, what you term bad may be the very thing that is good for your neighbour who is not trying to realise the Divine Life.

Let us take an illustration of the difference between the moral and the spiritual view of things. The ordinary social notions distinguish between two classes of men, — the generous, the avaricious. The avaricious man is despised and blamed, while the generous man is considered unselfish and useful to society and praised for his virtue. But to the spiritual vision, they both stand on the same level; the generosity of the one, the avarice of the other are deformations of a higher truth, a greater divine power. There is a power, a divine movement that spreads, diffuses, throws out freely forces and things and whatever else it possesses on all the levels of nature from the most material to the most spiritual plane. Behind the generous man and his generosity is a soul-type that expresses this movement; he is a power for diffusion, for wide distribution. There is another power, another divine movement that collects and amasses; it gathers and accumulates forces and things and all possible possessions, whether of the lower or of the higher planes. The man you tax with avarice was meant to be an instrument of this movement. Both are important, both needed in the entire plan; the movement that stores up and concentrates is no less needed than the movement that spreads and diffuses. Both, if truly surrendered to the Divine, will be utilised as instruments for its divine work to the same degree and with an equal value. But when they are not surrendered both are alike moved by impulses of ignorance. One is pushed to throw away, the other is pulled towards keeping

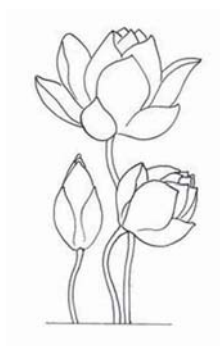
back; but both are driven by forces obscure to their own consciousness, and between the two there is little to choose. One could say to the much-praised generous man, from the higher point of vision of Yoga, “All your impulses of generosity are nothing in the values of the spirit, for they come from ego and ignorant desire.” And, on the other hand, among those who are accused of avarice, you can see sometimes a man amassing and hoarding, full of a quiet and concentrated determination in the work assigned to him by his nature, who, once awakened, would make a very good instrument of the Divine. But ordinarily the avaricious man acts from ego and desire like his opposite; it is the other end of the same ignorance. Both will have to purify themselves and change before they can make contact with the something higher that is behind them and express it in the way to which they are called by their nature.

In the same way you could take all other types and trace them to some original intention in the Divine Force. Each is a diminution or caricature of the type intended by the Divine, a mental and vital distortion of things that have a greater spiritual value. It is a wrong movement that creates the distortion or the caricature. Once this false impulsion is mastered, the right attitude taken, the right movement found, all reveal their divine values. All are justified by the truth that is in them, all equally important, equally needed, different but indispensable instruments of the Divine Manifestation.

4 August 1929

THE MOTHER

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SRI AUROBINDO, OTHER TEACHINGS, THE BUILDING OF AUROVILLE

A LETTER

Your circular is full of goodwill and a sincere desire to bring about harmony. You seem to have come across Aurobindonians who tend to be more religious than spiritual in their attitudes. It is the usual religious mind that sets up one alleged revelation in opposition to the approaches of other religions towards God. But one who claims to do an Integral Yoga cannot be exclusive in this fashion or come out with cudgels against people who are not yet aware of what Sri Aurobindo stands for. No true Aurobindonian tries to bully or browbeat anyone into becoming an Aurobindonian.

However, one must realise what is meant by saying, as you do, that a newcomer from an old Teaching has to be brought to a point where Sri Aurobindo can take over and that the old Teaching should be given its due as the newcomer's starting-point. If the old Teaching is a "starting-point" and if Sri Aurobindo has to "take over", surely it is admitted that there is something in Sri Aurobindo which exceeds the old Teaching and effects a consummation not possible with the old Teaching. When this is admitted, one cannot just say: "It has all been said before two thousand years ago and in other ages too." One cannot remain simply a Christian, a Buddhist, a Judaeon, a Zoroastrian, a Mohammedan, a Bahai or even an adherent to the Vedantic Hinduism which served as the base and background to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga — one cannot just be any of these things and still be an Aurobindonian. One does not "exclude" the old Teachings, for exclusion would run counter to integrality, but one certainly cannot keep them as they were. You have yourself understood Sri Aurobindo to imply that his Yoga "goes beyond Buddha, Christ, Krishna and other Teachings". If Sri Aurobindo "includes" all the Teachings of the past and yet goes beyond them, why does one have to keep them at all in their old recognisable forms instead of plunging wholeheartedly into Sri Aurobindo?

If we keep harking back to the great figures from whom the old Teachings emanated and to the terms in which they have chiefly gone home to humanity, we shall merely be using Sri Aurobindo to give a new look to the religious forces of the past. No doubt, we must not disdain these forces, but there must be what I may paradoxically call a sympathetic goodbye to them, a friendly break-away. Those forces have their own counterparts in Sri Aurobindo: so there will be no real loss, but they will now work in a wider context and be infused with new meanings. If that context and those meanings are to yield their full life-value and bring us a pull from the future in addition to a push from the past, the old associations need to disappear,

however gently and gradually. Otherwise we shall never get the total benefit of the light which Sri Aurobindo embodied for us. I may specifically make it clear that I do not mean only an adapting of the old Teachings to changed modern conditions. I mean something more than old wine in new bottles or even new wine in old bottles. In a certain important sense there have to be both new wine and new bottles. Two basic instances in point are the Aurobindonian concepts of “Supermind” and “Transformation”.

Sri Aurobindo says that he brought the term “Supermind” into general use and now it is employed in various ways quite far from his intention. Similarly he remarks that people talk of “Transformation” in senses that are very different from what he wants. Sri Aurobindo’s “Supermind” makes a fundamental difference in our vision of God’s activity and purpose in the world, and Sri Aurobindo’s “Transformation” carries us far beyond all previous ideals of sagehood, seerhood, sainthood. Time and again he has explained the precise content of these two key-terms of his Integral Yoga and how they make this Yoga very new on the whole in spite of old aims, methods, disciplines and experiences forming part of it, especially in the early stages.

Now I come to what you write on love of one’s fellows as a builder of Auroville. There is a fundamental truth in what I may call the essence of your message. For, the love you speak of is a mighty idealism and a forgetfulness of oneself. Your vision answers in its own way to Sri Aurobindo’s in those glorious lines of *Savitri*:

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent’s angel here;
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute.¹

But you will observe that Sri Aurobindo’s definition of love is openly charged with a sense of “heaven”, the “Transcendent”, the “Absolute”. Unless these high realities are made an active force in the lover’s consciousness, the unity towards which love drives will never be set on its way to consummation. Unquestionably if one is not capable of loving the human, one will not have the capacity to love the Divine, just as one’s love of the Divine will not be complete if cut off from love of the human. But the converse is even truer and more basic: one cannot fully and freely love the human without rooting oneself in love of the Divine.

What we name love of one another is as much coloured — whether grossly or subtly — by egoism as any other movement of our nature, however high-pitched it may be. The gospel of love of one’s fellows has been preached repeatedly but it has never brought about the hoped-for results. As long as no attempt is made towards an inner wideness and tranquillity which would lead us to an already existent

1. *Savitri*, p. 633.

Universal Being, the single infinite Self in all — as long as no turn is there towards the deep hidden “psyche” in us to whom God the beatific Super-Person is ever real as its Lord and its Origin, as the Master and Source of the whole world — we shall always have in our love a seeking for the satisfaction of our desires, a feeling of disgruntlement at things not going as we might wish, and even a resentment if the sort of response we want is not forthcoming. Our fine dreams and grand hopes will invariably founder on the blind rock of our divided egos.

A conscious Yoga must accompany the movement of love for our fellows, an intense turn both to the Cosmic Presence and to the Personal Divinity beyond all beings as well as within them. Then alone will love bring heaven to earth. Then alone shall Auroville be the City of Dawn built from the Light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

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The development of the experience in its rapidity, its amplitude, the intensity and power of its results, depends primarily, in the beginning of the path and long after, on the aspiration and personal effort of the sadhaka. The process of Yoga is a turning of the human soul from the egoistic state of consciousness absorbed in the outward appearances and attractions of things to a higher state in which the Transcendent and Universal can pour itself into the individual mould and transform it. The first determining element of the siddhi is, therefore, the intensity of the turning, the force which directs the soul inward. The power of aspiration of the heart, the force of the will, the concentration of the mind, the perseverance and determination of the applied energy are the measure of that intensity. The ideal sadhaka should be able to say in the Biblical phrase, “My zeal for the Lord has eaten me up.”

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 58)

THE MESSAGE OF SRI AUROBINDO

[The book *The Message of Sri Aurobindo . . . And His Ashram* was published in 1947. It had two essays: the first one, 'The Message of Sri Aurobindo' by P. B. Saint-Hilaire, an alumnus of the Ecole Polytechnique (Paris), and the second one, '. . . And His Ashram' by Gabriel Monod-Herzen, DSc, (Paris).]

The teaching of the ancient sages of India affirms that behind the manifold and fleeting forms of the universe there stands a single reality, an existence infinite and eternal. All beings are united in this Being, but an illusion, a fundamental and original ignorance, veils their consciousness and they see themselves as so many individuals separate from one another. This separateness of consciousness hides from them their true being, the one and eternal Self, and chains them to their false being, the perishable ego, which is but a reflection thereof on the moving waves of the world of appearances.

The fact that the individual consciousness has for its essential reality the Self, implies that every man can rend the veil of separateness and regain perception of his identity with all beings and with the universe. The omnipresent Self can be seen or felt in its integrality in each soul or in each form, but it is easier to find it at first in one's own self. Those who have been through this experience have described the attributes of the one reality as Existence (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Chit*) and Bliss (*Ananda*). It is because this eternal existence sustains each living being that it exists and lives. It is because this consciousness is in the depth of each individual being that it is itself conscious and capable of feeling. It is because this bliss resides deep down in the most miserable amongst us that he agrees and continues to live in this world of sorrow.

The entry into the supreme reality has been described as a union. It is the sense of the Sanskrit word "Yoga" that we use technically to designate it. It is at one and the same time a union with the Self, a union with all beings and with the world, a union with the Being, one and transcendent, beyond all the worlds. One or the other of these experiences may predominate.

India is the country which has cultivated most extensively the psychological discipline that enables man to emerge out of his primary ignorance in order to acquire supreme knowledge. The same word "Yoga" designates this discipline. There are numerous traditional systems of Yoga. Hindu philosophy has always admitted that spiritual experience has perforce been the touchstone of its various systems. Because of this fact it has remained more alive than the philosophy of the West, even though at times in its history it has likewise run the risk of being dried up

in the midst of purely intellectual constructions.

But the teaching of which we have spoken does not belong to India alone. Those who study mysticism, the living soul of religions, cannot fail to perceive the profound unity of its teaching. Religions differ; they have their dogmas, their rites, their codes, which vary according to culture, tradition, climate, geographical position, etc. But the mystics of all religions describe similar experiences and often in identical terms; they have travelled over the same stages of the same path.

Moreover, spiritual union is not the privilege of religious souls alone. Innumerable mystics belong to the borderland of orthodox religions; some have even been burnt for it. Anyway it is not necessary to adhere to any particular religious belief in order to go through the experiences of which we are speaking. This is generally the effect of Yogic discipline. It can also arise spontaneously, as the result of a movement of inner growth — of a flowering of the soul — following an intense aspiration towards truth, a painful moral crisis, a profound aesthetic emotion. It is then often partial, sometimes just for once and without a morrow. It is certain that a regular Yogic discipline, under the guidance of a qualified master, is the best means of avoiding shocks, stoppages and catastrophes, and of assuring a spiritual development, progressive and continuous.

Spiritual experiences assume various forms according to the parts of the being that are touched, according to individual idiosyncrasies and also according to the depths already attained. There are thus numerous categories of spiritual experience; but as soon as we wish to speak of them, we find ourselves confronted by a difficulty. The terms that one uses to describe them have no meaning except to those who have experienced them: silence, peace, light, truth, eternity, oneness, reality. These words, even those that habitually carry an abstract sense, here represent inner experiences as concrete as are the objects of the physical world to our senses — even more so, for the perception is direct and immediate. As the Vedic Rishis have said, words of the supreme wisdom have a meaning only for those who are already amongst the wise.

This difficulty of language is due to a profound cause. Modern civilisation is based on intelligence. The highest faculty of the man of to-day is his reason. He looks upon intelligence as an instrument of knowledge. But this is an error. We do not know anything by the intelligence. It cannot give us any certainty, any reply to the simplest of questions asked about God, the universe or ourselves. Intelligence is a wonderful classifier and constructor. It presents to us explanations, comparisons and well-ordered systems. But these are only images and models of the reality, never a direct view, an immediate perception of that reality. In order to convince ourselves of this it is enough to read modern physicists on the subject.

Intelligence is an instrument of action. By it man can seize the beings and forces of nature, and can adjust, organise, handle and utilise them to his own ends. That is why man, the mental being, the thinker, even if he truly knows nothing of

the reality, has nevertheless acquired considerable power over phenomenal nature. The contrast is significant.

A consequence of this fact is that true knowledge cannot dawn except when our intelligence has entered into silence and become quiet. That is why mental quietude plays such an important part in Yoga.

* * *

A fundamental spiritual experience is always a change of consciousness. Even when it occurs just once, it is decisive, because the soul is never the same as before. It has experienced a new birth, a birth out of the world of ignorance into the world of knowledge.

Man is born anew, he is born of the spirit.

The contrast thus perceived between the world we live in, the domain of ignorance, of obscurity, of falsehood, of suffering and of death, and the world of underlying reality, where reign truth, light, beatitude and the life eternal, naturally leads one to consider these worlds as fundamentally separate and irreconcilable. The intellect, ever inclined to put up trenchant distinctions between things and to change these distinctions into oppositions, will fetch up therefrom a support for its own dualistic views. It will declare eternal opposition between spirit and matter, between Purusha (Spirit, silent witness) and Prakriti (Nature, active and creative), between Brahman and Maya (cosmic illusion), between God and the world.

From there it is but one step to look upon this world as irremediably evil. Most mystics and ascetics have taken that step. For them, our world is either a place of trial where we have been placed by an arbitrary decree of God, and where our conduct will decide our future life, or a phantasmagoria without real existence, an evil dream from which we must wake up as soon as possible, or, finally, a sort of cosmic snare, to which we are glued from birth to birth by desire, born of ignorance.

One or another of these points of view leads us to seek our liberation outside the world or far from it. In order to withdraw from this world here, one must concentrate on the other, and give to this one the bare minimum of attention. The positive side of the discipline will then be an exclusive concentration on the supreme reality, whatever be the name we give it. Moreover, as the bonds that enchain man here below, or keep him in ignorance, are desires, the logical line of conduct would be to throw far back the objects of desire or to withdraw oneself at a distance from them, to refuse all food to desire so that it may wither and die. This is the negative side of the discipline.

Some have indeed felt how little satisfying is the conception that the universe appears to exist only for us to escape from it, or that it is a simple illusion, a dream which exists merely in the mind of the dreamer, or even that it is a sort of torture chamber created by a God who is nevertheless supposed to be kind and all-powerful.

Certainly, to see the universe as it is, one would easily veer to the opinion that if God is kind He is not all-powerful, and that if He is all-powerful He is not kind.

On the other hand, these views of the world, pushed to their ultimate conclusions, would inevitably lead to an atrophy of the faculties of expression and to the renunciation of mastery over matter. All activity has the character of a bondage, for one does not see that there can be any activity urged by aught but desire — except for helping other men to attain illumination and to escape from the world in their turn. It is then a negation of artistic creation, of scientific knowledge, of a greater mastery over nature and of a better organisation, economic and social.

This negation goes against some of the profoundest tendencies of the race, tendencies that cannot possibly be obliterated. A reconciliation is undoubtedly necessary between them and the other pole of human idealism, — aspiration towards the eternal and immutable reality.

* * *

It is here that Sri Aurobindo has brought before us a new urge towards the spiritual life of humanity by taking up again and pushing to their logical end the thoughts and experiences of the Vedic Rishis and completing and developing them by his own personal experiences.

The Supreme is at once the One and the Many; He is simultaneously immanent and transcendent; He is at once personal and impersonal; and yet He is beyond all these formulations. Each religion, each system has seized one aspect of the Absolute and set it up as the sole truth. But every aspect is true, relatively and partially, and is false when it puts itself in opposition to others. It is a great tragedy that the understanding of man cannot seize any particular truth without putting it at once in opposition to its counter-truth, which is as true as itself. As soon as one rises above the discursive intellect, one realises the fallacious character of these oppositions. The antinomies are only problems set forth badly, pseudo-problems. Science itself has recently encountered remarkable examples of such problems, which have given painful shocks to many hardened spirits; the material space, finite but without limits; light, at once undulatory and corpuscular in its nature; matter, identical with energy.

Nothing exists but the Supreme. If He is all, He is all the contraries, all the opposites, even while He remains the Absolute and is beyond everything. All that exists has come out of Him, remains in Him, remains Himself. The separation is only an appearance. It is He who lives, feels and thinks behind a limited consciousness in all beings. This limitation of the supreme Consciousness, its burial in matter in order to evolve a complex universe by a progressive development of the powers of this consciousness, is the key to the universe. Matter itself is not anti-divine. It is the same in essence as consciousness; it is a concretisation thereof. In a way, matter is spirit condensed; there is no essential difference between the two, all the powers of

the spirit are buried, asleep in matter. The aim of evolution is to reveal them, to manifest them.

If that is so, the world is not the contrary of God, it is not a place from which God is absent. He is here, present everywhere. It is He that lives, feels, and suffers in every one of us and who, in us and through us, reveals progressively His attributes: beauty, knowledge, power and love. The world is not a creation out of nothing, outside of God; it is not an illusion destitute of reality (even though the view that we have of it be necessarily limited and false); no more is it a place of trial wherein created beings have been placed in order to expiate a fault that they have never committed. It is rather a field of experiment where one of the innumerable possibilities that exist potentially in the Infinite is elaborating itself on a gigantic scale. No doubt other worlds exist, have existed or will exist, that will unfold other such possibilities. This world of ours is not the only one of its kind.

Our universe bears the stamp of separatism. This initial cleavage in the consciousness has permitted the multiplicity of individual centres of consciousness. Separation has brought about the illusion of freedom; it has also by the loss of global knowledge and a lack of comprehensive vision brought about ignorance. This freedom and this ignorance imply the possibility of self-deception, and consequently error, weakness, opposition, disharmony, — in one word, evil. Evil is the price paid for apparent liberty, for the illusion that the individual has of being separate from all and of having the power to oppose all. This illusion is, no doubt, necessary for a time; it marks a stage in the development of the consciousness of self. By it, the cosmic realisation will attain a depth, a richness, a power which would not otherwise have existed. The fall into the abyss will have permitted the conquest of the highest summits.

As each movement of consciousness has inevitably to develop all its consequences and to bear its fruits, separative ignorance has reaped an ample harvest, — falsehood, hatred, sorrow, death . . . But these attributes have not an inevitable character at all. They are the consequences of a veil, of a limitation of consciousness and are not attached to the material universe in itself. They will then disappear with the tearing of the veil and the re-establishment of consciousness in its integrality. The harmony is possible here in the material world; matter is capable of containing and manifesting the glorious perfection of the spirit.

Thus understood, the present imperfection of our world receives a satisfactory explanation. It is in reality transitory, tied to only a phase of cosmic development. The universe is not static, it is essentially dynamic, in constant evolution, as much from the physical point of view as from the subtler view-point of consciousness. And this evolution has a direction; it aims towards a manifestation of the latent powers of consciousness. So that what appears to us as a negation of these powers (obscurity, falsehood, suffering, death) should, if this point of view be correct, be seen as a movement in retrogression.

That it is so, can, at the present moment, appear rather as an article of faith than as an ascertained fact. On the morrow of the severe trial that humanity has been through, face to face with the prospect of another war still more devastating, seeing in what chaos moral, intellectual, economic, political and artistic, man is struggling, is it possible to uphold the notion of a progress as vast and comprehensive as the one envisaged here? Nevertheless if we reflect, we shall agree that the first sign of any progress is a more pointed consciousness of its necessity, the first index that an imperfection can be overcome is that it hurts us more acutely. There have been at all times individuals who have realised to their sorrow the imperfect nature of this world; but they have ever been only a few. Never has this imperfection been so apparent, so painfully felt by the greatest number as today. Never has an aspiration as sincere towards a better state of things been expressed so universally. At the same time it is being recognised that many of these imperfections, regarded till now as irremediable, are not really so; freedom from physical needs, immunity from diseases, prolongation of life, — are no longer classed as Utopian or impossible. A new sense of unity is becoming clear. Methods of scientific investigation reveal this unity in the domain of matter right up to the farthest limits of the universe. An economic interdependence joined to a greater proximity spatial (means of transport) and temporal (radio) carries this unity over into the domain of intelligent life. The globe has become too small and the methods of destruction too powerful to permit divisions and antagonisms to last much longer. It has become evident that mankind has perforce to become one or perish.

But it is not from a change of government, of the constitution or of the social system that man can expect a cure for his ills. The upsetting that is needed is of a deeper kind; it is a transformation of the consciousness that is called for. It is necessary for humanity to move on in this direction; it is imperative that at least a select few, who are capable of making themselves heard by others and followed by others, should go through this experience before a total reversal of values can establish itself, before a new ideal, creative of an entirely new civilisation, can surge forth. No system of philosophy, no religious revival, no social revolution can take the place of the necessary and inevitable spiritual transformation.

* * *

The terrestrial evolution is realised by a double movement of descent and ascent. Matter on the physical plane, pressed by the forces of the vital and mental planes, of those worlds of life and thought which along with the world of matter constitute our evolutionary universe, has organised itself and produced life. Animate forms have developed progressively throughout the prehistoric, vegetable and animal species. In the animal, the forces of the mental plane have successfully fashioned an instrument permitting them to assume contact with matter; thought is born in this world.

Consciousness buried in the substance of the mineral world has thus traversed by a slow and multiform ascent the stages of the two kingdoms in order to arrive at man: *Homo sapiens*. The intellect is in full bloom. Man is the brightest product of our universe.

But has he the character of a work finished and final? Vain indeed is he who would dare to affirm such a thing. Man is simply the present term of this evolution; he is not the ultimate term. In truth, there is no reason, except probably in man's conceit, why evolution should cease with him and not produce a subsequent type, which will differ from him as much as he differs from the animal, or the animal from the plant.

This next step in the ascent of embodied consciousness will arrive under the pressure of forces of a realm higher than the mental. Sri Aurobindo calls it simply the Supramental plane.

For a long time it has been held that the evolution of living species proceeded by a slow and gradual progression of one species out of another, without any sudden jump. But modern Biology admits the probability of the contrary. The transition from one variety to another occurs by an abrupt leap, a mutation, and it seems to be the same for the species, even though the fact has never been actually witnessed. No doubt there is a period of secret preparation when the various factors arrange themselves in order to allow the mutation, as well as a period of adaptation and flowering out that follows the mutation.

Sri Aurobindo asserts that we have arrived at an important turning-point in human history, where the descent of new powers of consciousness and their establishment on the earth are about to occur. On the crest of an evolutionary wave man has to make room for a new being.

Can one form an idea of what the new being is going to be? It would doubtless be better not to attempt a guess. Just as the monkey could not foresee what man would be like, man is probably incapable of anticipating and forming an idea as to what his successor will be like. He would be prone to imagine him as a glorified man, a being in whom the characteristic human faculties (intelligence, memory, will, etc.) will reach their zenith: a superman, in the Nietzschean sense. But he will certainly be nothing like it. That which will characterise him will be a new quality of consciousness, new faculties of the spirit, and not a development, not even a greater perfection of the existing faculties. These will not disappear; but the first place will belong to the highest.

In any case, the word 'progress' has a meaning, even though it be not the simple and childish one given to it by the Positivists of the nineteenth century, and even though it be not simply a state of technical development and increase of material well-being, as it was understood in the twentieth century. The faith in man's unlimited perfectibility, the fundamental optimism of man's heart and mind are completely justified.

It would be by the perception of the nature of the powers of the supermind that we would have the surest indication of the direction of the new stride which nature is making ready. The task is difficult, for it relates to a domain of consciousness which has not, up till now, been revealed or manifested on the earth; it is closed to the intelligence of man in the same way that the consciousness of Pasteur or of Pascal is closed to the understanding of the ape. The existence of mystics, of seers, of the inspired, of those who are clearly “in advance of the race” proves that the faculties of the new man will be synthetic and intuitive in nature, and that one of his prerogatives will be the definite establishment of his consciousness in the supreme Reality.

That is why those who are awake to a spiritual aspiration, and are permeated with an intense desire to know and to live the Reality, eternal and omnipresent, will be the fittest to grasp the meaning of the new perspective opening out before them:

“The spiritual life will draw its sustenance not from desire but from a pure and selfless spiritual delight of essential existence. And not only the vital nature in us whose stamp is desire, but the mental being too must undergo a new birth and a transfiguring change. Our divided, egoistic, limited and ignorant thought and intelligence must disappear; in its place there must stream in the catholic and faultless play of a shadowless divine illumination which shall culminate in the end in a natural self-existent Truth-Consciousness free from groping half-truth and stumbling error. Our confused and embarrassed ego-centred small-motived will and action must cease and make room for the total working of a swiftly powerful, lucidly automatic, divinely moved and guided Force. There must be implanted and activated in all our doings a supreme, impersonal, unfaltering and un stumbling will in spontaneous and untroubled unison with the Will of the Divine. The unsatisfying surface play of our feeble egoistic emotions must be ousted and there must be revealed instead a secret, deep and vast psychic heart within that waits behind them for its hour; all our feelings impelled by this inner heart in which dwells the Divine will be translated into calm and intense movements of a twin passion of divine Love and manifold Ananda. This is the definition of a divine humanity or a supramental race. This, not an exaggerated or even a sublimated energy of human intellect and action, is the type of superman whom we are called to evolve by our Yoga.” (Sri Aurobindo — *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Chapter III.)

Terrestrial evolution has so far proceeded under the direction of nature, acting as the executive agent of the Divine, without any conscious participation of the beings drawn along by this evolution. But man has now attained a position of full spiritual responsibility and the next step should be taken by an awakened and untrammelled will. The return to the Divine should be conscious and deliberate, and not automatic and fortuitous. That is why man should, in order to bring it about, collaborate with God; Yoga, union with the Divine, is the fruit of this collaboration. Such is the *raison d'être*, reason for existence of Yoga.

What is the method of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga? It is at once simple and complex. Simple, because its guiding principles are easy to grasp and few in number; complex, because it has to adapt itself to the infinite diversity of the life and being of man.

Sri Aurobindo has called his Yoga, the Integral Yoga. He has conserved and utilised the essential elements of the ancient yogic methods. The starting-point is a synthesis of the three classic paths of Yoga, which are: *the way of works*, in which union with the Divine is obtained by a consecration of will and action to the Divine, work being accomplished as an offering, without any attachment to the fruit thereof and with a perfect equality of soul with regard to its result; *the way of devotion*, which leads one to the goal by the path of an ever-growing intimacy with the divine Presence, by an exclusive adoration and all-absorbing love; *the way of knowledge*, where the path is a liberating vision of the One in all and of all in the One, leading to the perception of the activity of the universal Spirit in all things.

To these methods must be added the psychological discipline known as Raja Yoga, which insists on the realisation of mental silence as a preparation for the acquirement of superior knowledge. According to Sri Aurobindo all these various ways are to be utilised, simultaneously or successively, in order to approach the supreme Reality from all sides, to establish with It an affinity as varied and as profound as possible, and to get all the human faculties to participate actively in this union. Nevertheless, the whole thing is as yet but a preparation, a preliminary phase of Yoga which leads to the liberation of the individual consciousness and to its entry into the divine Reality. It should be followed by a second phase aiming at the transformation of human nature.

A spiritual experience has always a twofold aspect: liberation and mastery. It is often a bond broken, a door opened, a cloud dissipated, a heavy load laid down; it is an ascent into an atmosphere of purity and light. Then, as a consequence the liberated consciousness, from its new position, sets itself to act on the parts left behind, to enlighten them, to purify them, — or rather to direct, or cause to descend on them the purifying forces of the Spirit.

And as this transformation has to be integral, there is no question of omitting from its scope any element of human nature, any faculty, any individual attainment. All that there is has to be taken and accepted as a starting-point, such as it is. But no more can anything be preserved as it is at the starting-point, darkened, deformed, perverted by the forces of ignorance. Above all, individual egoism and desire must be eliminated, for they are at the very root of all perversion. The desire-soul in us must surrender itself to the profound divine law. Then, and then only, the perfection of intelligence, life and body becomes possible.

The destruction of desire and egoism cannot be achieved solely by methods of repression. These methods can prevent the outward manifestations of desire, but they run the risk of burying it again within the vault of the subconscious, where it lies hidden beyond the reach of the conscious will, biding its hour. The enemy thus

continues to exist, all the more dangerous as one believes it to be dead. Besides, ascetic repression brings about a drying up and a folding back. Along with the useless weeds, many plants in flower perish. Now, the disciple of integral Yoga aims at accomplishment, not at amputation — at a plenitude rich with the powers of the spirit, not at a sterile impoverishment. The task is thus more arduous; it must be approached in some other way.

One of the first findings made by a person who plunges into the inner life is the complexity of his nature — mental, vital and physical. He finds himself in the presence of a large number of distinct elements, each having its distinct existence, and each trying mostly to go its own way. The human being is a field of conflict of many contrary tendencies. The first necessity is to unify these divergent forces, and get them to submit to the central will. It is a long and difficult process, if one wishes to undo the knots and not to cut them. One after another, each part has to be taken up, studied, understood, converted and transformed. Each thing has to be put back in its place, purified of egoistic desires, surrendered to the guidance within, restored and limited to its proper function.

For the work of restoration, purification and transformation, the aspirant's own knowledge and power are altogether insufficient. He soon realises that he is utterly powerless in the face of this work; by his own efforts he can obtain only limited, unstable and superficial results. The work can be accomplished only by the divine Conscious Force acting for the perfection of his Yoga, the divine Mother as Yoga Shakti. The secret of Yoga is to bring about the descent of this divine Shakti, so that she can take charge of the labour of transformation and lead it to a triumphant issue.

To bring about the descent of divine Grace, one way alone is given to man and that is an inner attitude made up of three essential movements: aspiration, self-giving and a rejection of all false movements.

The initial aspiration towards light, peace, purity and perfection should be enlightened and intensified, and should become a great ardent flame that burns straight up without a flicker. It is more than a set prayer, it is a call of the heart to the Divine, accompanied by a will to open the whole nature and to transform it. To this call, the Grace of the Divine ever responds, but self-giving is the condition for it to be received and for it to be able to act.

The giving of self, of all that one possesses and of all one's movements, has to be sincere, that is to say, without any calculation or reservation. That implies a surrender to the divine Will as soon as it is perceived and as far as the disciple can discern it. But it does not mean an inert and passive surrender to all the movements of universal nature — instincts, passions, thoughts etc. Far from it. On the contrary, a vigilant discernment should disclose to us, through all subterfuge and hypocrisy, all that comes to us from the forces of ignorance and we should drive it back without hesitation or weakness.

The rejection needed is of desires, of impulsions and passions, of attachments

and preferences, of egoism, pride, lust, idleness, greed, jealousy, envy, fear, — the rejection of doubt, of obscurity, of stupidity, obstinacy and ill-will, — the rejection of habits and demands, of opinions and of preconceived ideas. All this, all that obstructs the action of the divine Shakti should first be recognised as not being ourselves, as not belonging to us, as coming to us from outside. It is thus easier to refuse it our consent, and then, with divine help, to liberate ourselves from its hold and to drive it out. The light, the purity and the power which descend from on high require that we accept them freely and that we deny ourselves to all that is contradictory and incompatible.

Surrender is a thing which many find a difficulty in accepting. To the modern spirit it appears to lessen the dignity and independence of the human being. The reason for this is that surrender to the divine will has often been preached in an interested fashion, with a view to encourage resignation and the acceptance of a physical or moral hold on individuals. But the abuse or perversion of a thing does not detract anything of its value or of its utility. It is enough to be on one's guard and to cultivate spiritual discernment. Submission is not resignation. The true Yogi is not a person resigned. He endures injustice and oppression as he endures falsehood, ugliness and weakness. If he does not, like a rebel, react violently to it, if he even appears to accept it for a time, it is partly because he knows that to him who has given himself to the Divine everything comes in its time, and that he should take it all as part of his Yogic discipline. But it is, above all, because he sees that the best remedy for unrighteousness is to bring down early the divine Truth, to ensure that in the opaque clouds of ignorance a rent appears and allows a ray of radiant truth to come through and touch sorrowful humanity. He realises the fact that the unknown sage who meditates in the silence of his Himalayan retreat in order to enlarge and deepen the contact between the human consciousness and the divine Consciousness, accomplishes a work infinitely richer in consequence for the future of mankind than that which he would have been able to accomplish by throwing himself into direct action with only his human instruments to help him. It is to this truth that India owes the importance of her spiritual heritage and of her contribution to the uplift of the world of tomorrow.

Freedom as against universal nature (physical, vital and mental) is good and legitimate, for she is being perverted by forces from whose control we have to free ourselves. But freedom against the Divine would not have any meaning at all for him who wishes to become one with Him. If the word 'liberty' swells the chest and makes the heart of man beat, it is because it raises an echo which surpasses all that man has so far understood by that word. True liberty is that of the inner self as against nature. A man truly free is he whom nothing down here can bind, nothing can hold back, on whom neither vanity nor anger nor fear can lay a hand, he who, with a clear vision and impelled by the Divine, acts without a personal motive, without desire and without attachment. He is not free who asserts his right to follow

his passions, or to pursue his interests, whether they be personal or those of his family, of his class or of his country.

Another confusion, which occurs frequently, is not without danger. It is a fact that, in the process of spiritual liberation, the disciple ceases to feel bound by social conventions, by current notions of good and evil, and even by rules of morality. They appear to him to be relative and arbitrary. He realises that every civilisation has its own rules and conventions, and that a social order quite as good as ours can rest on bases entirely different. But the disciple can forsake these rules (moreover, it is rather the rules that forsake him) only after having found the inner guide and the unerring control which replace all outer regulation. And certainly the inner guidance is more exacting than any moral code. To abandon the laws of morality only to become again a slave to one's passions, or to cover oneself with a pretended freedom from prejudices as with a screen, in order to hide one's excesses, is a downfall and not a progress.

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We shall speak a few words about the part played by the master in the spiritual development of the disciple. It can be said that his action proceeds in three different ways. Firstly, transmission by written or oral teaching, instruction, advice. Secondly, transmission by example: indeed the master is a person who has already realised oneness with the Divine and whose life is a manifestation of this oneness. Thirdly, transmission by invisible influence and occult action. This last is the most important of the three; it is a tangible and constant reality for the advanced disciple.

For one who recognises the universe to be a gradual manifestation of the Divine, it is easy to admit a constant action of the Divine therein — under forms more or less apparent, more or less direct, more or less effectual. The supernatural enters into the natural the whole time. The determinism, apparently rigorous, of universal nature shows superposed planes of causality which penetrate into one another. There is a determinism physico-chemical, a determinism vital, a determinism mental. Every time that the consciousness opens itself to forces from a higher plane, a determinism of another order is superimposed on the first and modifies it entirely. In proportion as our consciousness can open to the supramental forces, the determinism, apparently inevitable, of our evolutive world can be broken. Thenceforth the cosmic action of the aspects and manifestations of the one Supreme Consciousness — the gods, the avatars, the incarnations — ceases to be an enigma or a superstition. It becomes possible to understand that, for the disciple, the Guru (the spiritual master) is, in a real and effective way, a special and chosen channel of the divine Grace.

Without the support of the hand that guides and uplifts, without the direction of the vision that discerns and enlightens, without the aid of the heart that consoles and sustains, the disciple would have, indeed, small chance of surmounting the

formidable difficulties of the task which he has undertaken, of avoiding dangers, of stepping over asperities, of passing amidst traps and quagmires, of going through doubt and discouragement, in short, of following the path, “narrow as a razor’s edge”, as the ancient Scriptures designate it.

In the working of the divine Power one can distinguish three stages, which however, are not clear-cut and run into one another. The first is the stage in which personal effort predominates. The triple attitude, described above, perfects itself and results, at first in consecration, then in an integral giving of the self to the Divine. The second is a transition from the human to the divine action. It is marked by a growing influx of the power that is descending, by a vigilant surrender and a supple and conscious response to this action. In the last stage there is no longer any personal effort or any established method; effort gives place to a blossoming, spontaneous, puissant and happy, of the Divine flower out of the heart of the lower nature, purified and perfected:

“The Supreme has laid his luminous hand upon a chosen human vessel of his miraculous Light and Power and Ananda.” (Sri Aurobindo — *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Chapter II.)

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Such is the vision which Sri Aurobindo spreads out before our eyes. His works present a conception about the world, about the place which man occupies in the world, and about his destiny, which is capable of satisfying the most ardent idealist and, at the same time, of paying due regard to the demands of the rationalistic brain. He whom it interests will be able to find therein a comprehension of most of the religious symbols and myths, obscure and little understood in our days. It englobes and explains the experience of the mystics and the occult tradition. It proceeds from the most ancient Vedic texts and is in agreement with the ideas of modern science. Lastly, it gives a meaning to the present-day convulsions of humanity in labour. Such a synthesis has never been made before.

The pages of this study are not restrictive. They present what we consider to be the essential points but do not exhaust the subject. Many other aspects could have been approached; some that are connected with vast problems have only been touched upon.

We would go against the spirit of his writing if we conveyed the impression that Sri Aurobindo offers us a philosophic doctrine. No doubt, his teaching can be justified intellectually as well as any other, if not better. The reader is even struck by the logical sequence and the compact nature of the arguments put forward. But the author himself tells us that the ultimate proof is experience — not experience of the senses, but Yogic experience, internal, equally valid and equally convincing.

Some people will not easily admit this proof, alleging that introspection is not

a sure method of knowledge. It is, they say, subject to illusion and error. But so is the other — sense knowledge. Both demand that one accepts certain conditions, one submits to the desired sway, in order to avoid illusion and eliminate error. Inner knowledge has, straight off, a higher value than perceptible knowledge in this, that it is direct and that, proceeding by identity, it attains even the reality of the object without passing through the distorting intermediary of a transmission by the senses or by an image of the mind. In any case, Sri Aurobindo's works are a proof that this knowledge can, when it is intellectually translated, furnish a view of the world perfectly reasonable and satisfying. But still it is not a system of philosophy; it is a teaching of one who knows and who sees.

If this teaching is not a system of philosophy, much less is it a religious doctrine; it contains no dogma. Sri Aurobindo offers us what he knows and sees; he gives his explanations and his advice in reply to questions asked. But he imposes no view of his on anybody. Sri Aurobindo's aim is to put the disciple in a position to know for himself. It is for this personal experience that he prepares him and invites him. He asserts constantly that in Yoga a little practice is worth more than a great deal of theory. Intellectual study is a preparation which the disciple can pass by; its principal aim is to calm the questioning and reasoning intelligence and to ensure that it surrenders itself, satisfied, to a mode of knowledge which transcends it.

It is quite possible to start in Yoga without a belief in God, without even admitting that there can be experiences transcending our senses (provided that one is not an obstinate negator). What is indispensable is an ardent aspiration of the heart and mind towards a life, truer, finer, purer and vaster, and a readiness to give all in order to realise it.

Sri Aurobindo makes no pretension to novelty. His teaching is a formulation in the language of our epoch of a part of the supreme knowledge. That which he has translated is unchanging and eternal, even though the translation, the formulation, has necessarily to be partial, and adapted to the conditions of the moment. Many sages of the past felt beforehand what has now been discovered, many seers foresaw the marvellous vision. They have left to other men some allegories, by way of encouragement: the kingdom of God on earth, the new Golden Age, the second advent of Christ, the Magnum Opus of mystic alchemists. But Sri Aurobindo announces to us the proximity of its realisation and, by his presence, gives us the assurance thereof. For that we bear towards him an infinite gratitude.

P. B. SAINT-HILAIRE

(Translated from French by C. C. Dutt, I. C. S. [Retired])

. . . AND HIS ASHRAM

For the classical Indian Yogas, the liberation of the human being is a victory won by consciousness over nature; it is an escape from the circle of natural ties and presupposes a separation of our consciousness from our material, vital and mental personality as complete as the preservation of our physical life will allow.

Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, puts liberation as the very goal of the natural evolution of the being; it is the condition requisite for a transformation of the personality by a penetration of the spiritual force into its most material depths.

This new message does not deny the value of the classical Yogas; rather it completes them. It takes their results as valid, but transforms their character and gives to the whole of life a new sense and a new value. The old Yogas aimed at the liberation of the consciousness from the bondage of material nature; Sri Aurobindo seeks a more complete victory, since his aim is to transform nature integrally by the descent of the Spirit into it.

And this result instead of being conceived as an act opposed to the movement of nature is on the contrary regarded as the very expression of the spiritual evolution.

In thus setting as the aim of our existence the ideal of a perfection to be realised in our material life, an ideal which in fact underlies our whole life and sustains it and makes it inwardly worthy of being loved, Sri Aurobindo gives once more a new nobility to all the elements of our being, including our social tendencies.

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It has been often said that man is a social animal and in fact human groups organise themselves quickly enough into unities whose tendencies are revealed by their structure. Sri Aurobindo's disciples have not escaped from this law.

To say the truth, when Sri Aurobindo settled at Pondicherry in 1910 with four companions of past days, he had no desire to be a Guru, a spiritual teacher and had therefore no intention of creating an Ashram.

But his firm resolution was to follow whatever the path he found in the course of his Yoga to be the right one and to leave nothing in it undone. Newcomers joined little by little the first companions. From four the number rose to ten and then to twenty-five. And the passion of patriotism which had moved the first of these men was transformed into an ideal of human perfection to be lived.

In 1920 a French lady who had found a need on her part to see spiritual perfection express itself in the material life came to live close to this group. Under her influence, the life around Sri Aurobindo organised itself and began to reflect the ideal animating him. In 1925, the disciples who were living in separate houses,

found their life organising itself into something like a family grouping and in less than a year Sri Aurobindo decided to withdraw from all direct participation in the life of the community and entrusted his disciples to her who thenceforth became the Mother: thus the Ashram was formed.

* * *

An Ashram is a community grouped around a teacher with a view to live according to a certain spiritual ideal. It is neither an association nor a monastery. An Ashram has no need of statutes and regulations; the directions of the teacher take their place. This could be dictatorship, but it is not, since everyone while accepting the rules which make of him a part linked harmoniously to the whole, retains nonetheless all his inner freedom.

This freedom manifests itself very strongly in the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo. It is a characteristic element of the atmosphere which is proper to it. Indeed, where the ideal is a renunciation of the world to the sole profit of the spirit, a certain uniformity takes shape among those living a diminished life. But here the ideal is a fulfilment in the very heart of the material being, an irradiation that must enter into every act. The personality far from being reduced to a mere support, has to grow and become a more and more perfect expression of the spirit animating it.

When we compare after an absence of some years, the life and attitude of the disciples of the Ashram at Pondicherry, what strikes us most is the growth that each personality has undergone according to its own nature. And this has happened in every field, that is to say, for almost every aspect of life; for the 500 disciples of Sri Aurobindo who live in the 80 houses scattered about in the town form more than a village. Almost all the professions are represented there: cultivators, smiths, poets, mechanics, musicians and writers, artists and accountants. All is found there and everyone, as in an ideal republic, pursues his activities with joy.

This joy is an essential character. It is so true, so strong that even when one passes a disciple in the street, one is struck by it. They are happy people.

There are certainly several causes for this joy, of which some are wholly internal, but among others two are predominant. First of all, this activity is not paid. The disciple receives everything from the Ashram, that is to say, from his teacher to whom he has given all when he came in. So there are no longer any "professions" in the ordinary sense of the term. There is an activity worked out because it has to be worked out and one endeavours to work it out perfectly, for perfection is the expression of the Divine. "Yoga," says the Gita "is skill in works". (II. 50)

In the second place, everyone carries out an activity which corresponds to his true nature, to the law of his own being. It is not rare to see a newly arrived disciple change his calling. One who was a singer, becomes an accountant, the bourgeois a musician, the professor a poet, the official a peasant. These changes are never the

result of tests, aptitude examinations, but always the fulfilment of an inner desire, of an urge which is the way of the true being seeking to harmonise its external activities with its own deepest reality. This harmony is a condition for happiness — the experience of the Ashram proves it. It shows also that Sri Aurobindo is right when he sees in the simplest and most general tendencies of the human being, his desire for happiness and perfection, a crude and awkward expression of possibilities, that is to say, of the future stages of the evolution.

This multiplicity of activities poses numerous technical questions and the Ashram solves them in a manner contrary to what is done normally. For instance, it is the normal way for us first to establish a laundry and then to look for a laundry man, but here it is done just the other way round. It is because a disciple shows a pronounced inclination towards an activity that a scope is given to it.

In this way the Ashram has started one after another workshops for carpentry and furniture-making, for mechanics, a smithy, a bakery, a laundry, a farm, a press. In each and every one of these enterprises the work of management and supervision is entrusted to disciples. It is they also who form a good part of the labour, the rest being taken from workmen outside. However, it is the disciples alone who are allowed to look after all that concerns food.

In a climate like that of India, questions of food take a primary importance. The Ashram has come to fix upon a diet at once simple, substantial and perfectly healthy. It is prepared with a rigorous cleanliness by means of traditional Indian utensils.

This is an exception which confirms the rule. On the one hand the workshops of the Ashram are by far the most modern in the town in respect of the tools used, on the other hand the kitchen remains still in the ancient stage. The kitchen has a fine appearance no doubt with its huge basins of brass, but it is somewhat of a juggler's feat to prepare three times a day enough food to feed 500 persons. It is because till now, circumstances, that familiar form of destiny, have not brought about the construction of a modern kitchen.¹

This is a point which distinguishes Sri Aurobindo's Ashram from most other similar communities. In that of Mahatma Gandhi, for example, the simplicity of means, their purely Indian character in each activity, are traits deliberately willed. Here on the contrary, one sees the opposite tendency finding expression: machinery is gladly accepted and every technical progress is utilised as soon as that becomes possible.

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1. It is on the way and one has already been started. (Translator's Note)

One day the Ashram had a magnificent opportunity of constructing a building. It must be said that the growing number of disciples in a town as populated as Pondicherry creates a chronic housing problem. So the idea of lodging some fifty disciples in a large single house was enthusiastically welcomed when the generosity of a donor made possible the enterprise. It was decided to name the building Golconde.

The building, planned by the architect Antonin Raymond, consists of two storeys on a raised ground floor; it is wholly built in reinforced concrete. It contains no glass panes, no windows, even no walls on either of its long fronts. These are made of Venetians with ferro-concrete blades one metre long and capable of any inclination whatever. One can therefore regulate at will the lighting and ventilation of the rooms. These are of course separated from the front on one side by a corridor, but the partition between the corridor and the room is made of teak batons alternately fixed on the two sides of a frame, so that air can pass through, but one cannot see through them.

This building contains an installation for *toilette* with *lavabos* and washing places for clothes, complete with hot water whose temperature is regulated automatically; there is a place for drying clothes on the roof.

The furniture is made wholly in the Ashram workshops and consists of what is really necessary and nothing more: cupboards, book-cases, brackets, chairs, tables and cots. Every item of furniture was specially studied in view of its use in a hot country, sometimes damp, always infested with insects, and every one of them is a success.

These pieces of furniture, perfect as they are, have been the cause of great difficulties. The building was completed during the war. But at the moment hard wood was requisitioned by the army and the work of furniture-making was so delayed that a portion of Golconde remained vacant.

It will not remain so for long. Peace will bring back to the wood market its normal activity and inmates will not be lacking. As a matter of fact, the number of Ashram inmates shot up all on a sudden from the day when children began to be admitted. For years they had been entirely excluded. The quiet insistence of life however in the end opened to them an entry. Parents came who could entrust their children to none else and one day (it was during the last war) a school was started to give them education and a house arranged to lodge those who could not remain with their parents.

The Ashram School has not been made for the children to get degrees; like all other activities of the disciples the work here too brings in nothing, nothing but the flowering of the being. The Ashram School has been made for children and the children love it.

Two features dominate it: the importance given to sports and to education proper. The sports whether in the form of games or of gymnastics are practised by

everybody, by girls as well as boys. The idea of feminine sport is quite foreign to the classical programme of education in India and the Ashram School is the only institution at Pondicherry where it is practised. It is also the one in which masculine sport has the best part. I mean by that that it is really sportive, that it tends to develop in the youth not the sense of competition but the sense of team work, of free discipline. That certainly is due to the quality of the instructors but the quality of the children and the general atmosphere go far to contribute something to it. It is very remarkable, for example, to have succeeded in training up boxers who oppose but do not fight.

This is a sign of the importance given in the School to education of character. What is sought here is above all to make men and women of a high quality. In this work, instruction has a share and an important share but it remains subordinated to the whole and the results obtained till now largely justify this point of view.

School work and physical culture besides are but a part of the life of the youth of the Ashram. The School admits only children of Sri Aurobindo's disciples who are from 4 to 18 years of age. The youngest ones pass their day at school, they are so happy there that it is not rare to find a little brother or a little sister left at home surreptitiously slipping into the class in the midst of his or her elders and refusing to go out.

We know of the excellent results obtained in certain schools by occupying the elder students with manual work, such as carpentry, book-binding etc. At the Ashram School children between 14 and 18 pursue truly a vocation. Some are mechanics, some cultivators, a good number of young girls work at the Printing Press. It is an innovation which has remarkable consequences.

First of all, no notion of social hierarchy as between the various vocations can develop among these youths. Their school comrades pass a part of the day with them, other hours are given to other activities; equality is not disturbed for there is no question of a salary which would fix different values on different forms of works.

Next, the depreciating idea of a vocation considered as an imposed task does not exist among these students. It is a normal and pleasant part of life. This too is a teaching.

With regard to the programme of study, it is striking because of the large part given to French and because of the absence of all religious or philosophical teaching. The works or the thought of the Teacher of the Ashram are not expounded nor commented upon.

It is the same with regard to the rest of the Ashram. That is a fact which surprises very much some of the visitors. These disciples of one and the same Master do not attend any common lectures nor follow a common programme of teaching.

It is because everyone of them has for task to discover and follow his own rule, to determine the kind of study which suits him best. Every disciple has daily the opportunity to be in the presence of the Mother. By letters addressed to the Mother every disciple can ask for the help he needs. Thus he follows his path in

perfect liberty.

Inner life and outer activity — two faces of the same single life — are thus different for different people and no hierarchy marks externally the stages of the path traversed.

Towards the end of every month, everyone informs by means of a note written to the Mother his material necessities for the following month. And on the first of the month, everyone receives, with the Mother's blessings, what she considers truly necessary for him. But as the Indian custom requires that one should always have an offering in one's hand when approaching the Teacher, everyone offers flowers to the Mother before he receives his requirements.

Flowers play a great part in the life of the Ashram. They are there in all the houses, whether in pots in the garden, or in bouquets on the table. They offer their beauty and their fragrance every moment and imbue life with their symbol of the offering of the best of oneself.

For the great secret of the spiritual life is a complete self-giving to the Divine, not only in the silence of meditation but also in all the activities of a life which seeks to participate in all His modes of manifestation.

GABRIEL MONOD-HERZEN

(Translated from French by Nolini Kanta Gupta)

As for me, I must confess to you that I feel much more essentially myself when I am joyful and when I play — in my own way — than when I am very grave and very serious — much more. Grave and serious — that always gives me the impression that I am dragging the weight of all this creation, so heavy and so obscure, whereas when I play — when I play, when I can laugh, can enjoy myself — it gives me the feeling of a fine powder of delight falling from above and tinting this creation, this world with a very special colour and bringing it much closer to what it should essentially be.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1957-58, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, p. 13)

ALL THE BIRDS OF OXFORDSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE — ON SEIZING THE SPIRITUAL IN POETRY

There is nothing which gives you a joy equal to that of gratitude. One hears a bird sing, sees a lovely flower, looks at a little child, observes an act of generosity, reads a beautiful sentence, looks at the setting sun, no matter what, suddenly this comes upon you, this kind of emotion — indeed so deep, so intense — that the world manifests the Divine, that there is something behind the world which is the Divine.

The Mother
The Sunlit Path, p. 160

Defining the Spiritual

How to define the spiritual? How to define God?

Because these things are so subjective, because the experiences of the spiritual are so indefinable, it is an arrogance that would dare attempt it. I therefore make no apology for the fact that this essay and my understanding of what can be considered spiritual is very subjective. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that the spiritual is experienced in the heart or above the mind and yet we are obliged to use the limited language of the mind to define or express the indefinable. In a way, the truly great music can more readily express these things that words struggle to express, because music does not need words. It is vibration. It either goes directly to the heart or it lifts one up above thought to share the experience of soaring in some infinite.

And yet there is a whole spectrum of poetry that is the outpouring of spiritual experience, from simple lines that hint at something spiritually experienced to poems from some overhead plane above the mind, that are *mantric*, that come as if ready-prepared from some realm above and have simply used the poet as an instrument.

Some poems are overtly spiritual and express adoration for the name of a God or deity, or even address God directly, like a prayer. Some are much more covert, more subdued, describing perhaps not even a spiritual experience *per se* but hinting at its impact and after-effect.

Some poems express a deep yearning for a life to be lived in oneness with the consciousness of the truth of things and the spirit. Some convey vividly a sense of truth or honesty or strongly evoke a sense of connection with the place or scene we may have experienced, but the experience is not only of the physical space or scene witnessed but of an indefinable something else beyond.

My good friend and mentor Sonia Dyne has pointed out that “so-called ‘spiritual poetry’ does not have to deal specifically with ‘spiritual’ themes: it can be a celebration of nature, an expression of religious belief, or simply a deeply felt outpouring of emotional response without any intellectual quality as in purely devotional poetry. The essential thing is recognition, overt or implied, of a hidden oneness uniting all human life with the life around us in Nature and the poet’s response of wonder and awe or delight or gratitude.”

The subdued touch of the Spiritual

There seems to be a type of spiritual poetry where the spiritual is understated, restrained, almost covert. Take these simple lines by Edward Thomas in his poem ‘Adlestrop’

Yes, I remember Adlestrop —
 The name, because one afternoon
 Of heat the express-train drew up there
 Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
 No one left and no one came
 On the bare platform. What I saw
 Was Adlestrop — only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
 And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
 No whit less still and lonely fair
 Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
 Close by, and round him, mistier,
 Farther and farther, all the birds
 Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

The first two verses describe the station scene observed from the train that has stopped there in a matter-of-fact way. In verse three the poet is then suddenly moved into a different space, observing the nature around the country station as seen from the train but already lifted from observing it in a mundane way. Thomas then tunes into the sound of birdsong, starting nearby with a blackbird, but then hearing the chorus of ‘all the birds of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire’, a physical

impossibility but in the wider state of consciousness he has entered, a different and more sublime sense of reality unbounded by the specific and literal. This is the touch of the spiritual that can invade us in a silent moment of true experience of nature and is perhaps felt by many without even realising it or considering that it has been in any way a spiritual experience.

Or even more understated, consider ‘Early One Morning’ by the Auroville poet Navoditte (Norman Thomas):

The sun got up; so did I,
 slow and cosy, half in sleep.
 Stumbling out, I sat upon the step:
 receiving nothing from the night
 I expected nothing from the day.
 There was a tree in flower,
 a scratching dog,
 the sun was shining on the sea.
 But then, at half-past by the clock,
 the world turned over . . . flip . . .
 and changed all that.
 And when it all had settled down,
 resplendently I saw:
 a tree in flower,
 a scratching dog,
 and the sun O shining on the sea.

Navoditte describes, in a simple, matter-of-fact way, the experience of waking up, still sleepy, observing what he sees. But then quite suddenly he has an experience at some undescribed other level that totally and *resplendently* transforms the same scene. He does not describe what he has experienced, only its after-effects. He returns to describe again what he now sees and gives the merest hint of the splendour of his transformed vision with

“and the sun O shining on the sea.”

There is a beautiful simplicity and power to this poem that again speaks of an uplifting momentary experience that many of us have had without perhaps even really knowing or acknowledging it. One is reminded of Eliot’s lines from ‘Little Gidding’ in *The Four Quartets*:

And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time

Henry Reed's profound yet deliciously amusing 'The Naming of Parts' brings to mind those experiences in which we are confronted with the banality of our normal, adult world and its obsession with boring detail and essential worldly things where yet the inner being observes the ridiculousness of the situation we find ourselves in whilst simultaneously being aware of a truer, more beautiful world around us. And it's all done with a wonderful lightness of touch.

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all the neighbouring gardens,
And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel,
Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this
Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it
Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this
Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards
The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:
They call it easing the Spring.

By any conventional definition one might dismiss this poem as not being spiritual.

The poet is in the army and is being instructed in the cleaning and maintenance of a rifle by a higher-ranked soldier whose typical turn of phrase is so exactly caught that one could almost be in the presence of the instructor

“And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb.”

But to me, the poem speaks of the widened consciousness that observes the world exactly, one could say a consciousness that is aware of simultaneous worlds, that witnesses the absurdity inherent in our ‘serious’ normal human realities whilst smilingly grounding itself in the real, the natural world with all of its beauty.

Here is a poem written by Eira Dyne, when aged sixteen, in which she articulates her relationship with and understanding of God.

I know him in a word, this figure they call “God”
They made him real, and with added guilt
We called him AUM.
(They saw his gifts
Yet I never felt his rich joys.)

I did not believe.

Through the years of confusion
I have still grown and felt him there
He has kissed me and I have felt his tears
But it is not the same.

He has turned and sewn his thread in another weft
Of streams and lakes, trees and hills
All of greater birth.
And I, never failing, with arms outheld
Embrace him — nor could I ever keep him at bay
He is no God: his vastness such,
He is life itself.

Consider now Dylan Thomas’ well-known poem ‘Fern Hill’

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves

Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.
 And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.
 All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
 And playing, lovely and watery
 And fire green as grass.
 And nightly under the simple stars
 As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 Flashing into the dark.
 And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
 With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
 The sky gathered again
 And the sun grew round that very day.
 So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
 In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
 Out of the whinnying green stable
 On to the fields of praise.
 And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
 In the sun born over and over,
 I ran my heedless ways,
 My wishes raced through the house high hay
 And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
 In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
 Before the children green and golden
 Follow him out of grace,
 Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,

Nor that riding to sleep
 I should hear him fly with the high fields
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
 Time held me green and dying
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Would you have thought of this as a spiritual poem? Yet it is a cry for the lost glory and innocence of childhood.

“And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
 In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
 Before the children green and golden
 Follow him out of grace,”

It is also a statement of defiance against what seems like the imprisonment of the adult world:

“Though I sang in my chains like the sea.”

Whenever we hear or read this poem, it can evoke in us a deep psychic sadness at the loss of our own state of grace, our childish innocence and state of truth, so powerful it can make us feel a physical pain in our heart. It may not be generally considered as such, but a poem that evokes such intense feelings is surely a spiritual poem. I am reminded of Virgil’s line, so often quoted by Sri Aurobindo:

Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt

The touch of tears in mortal things

The Spiritual and the Psychic touch in Poetry

But what is the difference between the psychic and the spiritual overhead planes?

. . . the tone of the psychic is different from that of the overhead planes, — it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of true perception, an intimate language. The expression “sweetness and light” can very well be applied to the psychic as the kernel of its nature. The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of

light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful authority, strength and space.

Sri Aurobindo
Letters on Poetry and Art
(CWSA Vol. 27, pp. 84-85)

Amal Kiran was a poet at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram whose talents were lovingly nurtured by Sri Aurobindo himself. In his poem ‘This Errant Life’, Amal yearns for “Sky-lucent Bliss”, the pure high spiritual experiences which are at the summits of the overhead spiritual planes and yet still pleads for the Divine to express the love Amal yearns for in actual human experience.

This errant life is dear although it dies;
And human lips are sweet though they but sing
Of stars estranged from us; and youth’s emprise
Is wondrous yet, although an unsure thing.

Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!
I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.
If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.
For ’tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
And all Thy formless glory turn to love
And mould Thy love into a human face.

Sri Aurobindo was full of praise for this poem and said of the last eight lines:

. . . there is this [spiritual-mental] illumination but it is captured and dominated by the inner heart and by the psychic thrill, a certain utterance of the yearning and push of psychic love for the Divine incarnate.

Letters on Poetry and Art
(CWSA Vol. 27, p. 84)

Shelley’s poem ‘To —’ is full of an intense psychic emotion, of this yearning for a love truer, deeper, higher than human love which so often disappoints because it is invariably tainted with ego:

One word is too often profaned
 For me to profane it,
 One feeling too falsely disdained
 For thee to disdain it;
 One hope is too like despair
 For prudence to smother,
 And pity from thee more dear
 Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love,
 But wilt thou accept not
 The worship the heart lifts above
 And the Heavens reject not,
 The desire of the moth for the star,
 Of the night for the morrow,
 The devotion to something afar
 From the sphere of our sorrow?

Tearing the veil from Deity's Face

In my view, the most sublime, the perfect perfection of spiritual poetry is *Savitri*, which Sri Aurobindo wrote over a period of forty years, regularly revising the poem as his own consciousness rose to ever higher levels. This poetry is:

The lines that tear the veil from Deity's face

Savitri (CWSA Vol. 34, p. 677)

The problem for the ordinary reader is that to read and understand the poem requires not only that the reader approaches it with a mind silent and free from the normal obstructive mental noise, but it also helps if one has had the comprehension that comes from having a taste of the inner experience itself.

The critic or reader will judge for himself whether I have succeeded or failed; but if he has seen nothing and understood nothing, it does not follow that his adverse judgment is sure to be the right and true one, there is at least a chance that he may so conclude, not because there is nothing to see and nothing to understand, only poor pseudo-stuff or a rhetorical emptiness but because he was not equipped for the vision or the understanding. *Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences.

Letters on Poetry and Art (CWSA Vol. 27, p. 343)

Sri Aurobindo always discouraged attempts by his followers to write his biography, saying that his life was not on the surface for people to see. Yet in *Savitri* we have the detailed record, rendered in often sublime poetry, of Sri Aurobindo's inner journey, of his experiences in all the subtle and occult worlds. Typically, the overhead poetry is written from a consciousness and vision above and beyond our mortal comprehension of space and time. It also serves as a guide to those who wish to undertake the Integral Yoga and as an account of the events and process of the transformation of human consciousness. But *Savitri* is also a poem that relishes in the joy of language whilst still depicting events and observations of life and nature seen both from the here and now and yet simultaneously seen from "some eternal eye", rising to poetic magnificence with lines like:

I caught for some eternal eye the sudden
King-fisher flashing to a darkling pool

Savitri (CWSA Vol. 34, p. 405)

Now consider these lines from Book Three, Canto Four of *Savitri*, which seem to describe in symbolic terms the current chaos of the world and might be considered to be prophetic of the events that they are in process of leading to:

I know that thy creation cannot fail:
For even through the mists of mortal thought
Infallible are thy mysterious steps,
And, though Necessity dons the garb of Chance,
Hidden in the blind shifts of Fate she keeps
The slow calm logic of Infinity's pace
And the inviolate sequence of its will.
All life is fixed in an ascending scale
And adamantine is the evolving Law;
In the beginning is prepared the close.
This strange irrational product of the mire,
This compromise between the beast and god,
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world.
I know there shall inform the inconscient cells,
At one with Nature and at height with heaven,
A spirit vast as the containing sky
And swept with ecstasy from invisible founts,
A god come down and greater by the fall.
A Power arose out of my slumber's cell.
Abandoning the tardy limp of the hours
And the inconstant blink of mortal sight,

There where the Thinker sleeps in too much light
 And intolerant flames the lone all-witnessing Eye
 Hearing the word of Fate from Silence' heart
 In the endless moment of Eternity,
 It saw from timelessness the works of Time.
 Overpassed were the leaden formulas of the Mind,
 Overpowered the obstacle of mortal Space:
 The unfolding Image showed the things to come.
 A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;
 There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;
 Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death
 Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;
 There was a clangour of Destruction's wings:
 The Titan's battle-cry was in my ears,
 Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night.
 I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.
 Into the fallen human sphere they came,
 Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
 Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
 Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
 Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
 Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,
 Feet echoing in the corridors of Time.
 High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
 Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
 And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods

And dancers within rapture's golden doors,
 Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
 And justify the light on Nature's face.

Savitri (CWSA Vol. 33, pp. 342-44)

For most poets of the spiritual, their inspiration arises from a momentary visitation of light from above the lid of mind, or from some passionate outburst from deep within or a calm, quiet expression of the psychic being, the soul.

In *Savitri* we constantly get lines written from such a permanently vast and luminous station of consciousness above the mind that it was said of Sri Aurobindo that he had a "mind of light":

"It saw from timelessness the works of Time."

This is the summit of consciousness from which the past and the future are seen as a single panorama, from which prophecy is manifested and the truth and fullness of things is effortlessly seized.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* traces the journey of the soul through its life experience and traces the exploration of the subtle worlds that are encountered by seekers. It is our own story. Our lives *are* the debate of love and death.

We are born into a world of Inconscience, yet in childhood we live in the moment, unburdened by thoughts of yesterday and tomorrow. Life is discovery, it is play, it is joy. We grow and change and collect our burden of damage. Our lives are lived in an existential darkness occasionally visited by moments when light breaks through. For a period we are in the school of hard knocks, at the mercy of the world's cruelty and life's seemingly random events that shape our journey. Notwithstanding any attempts by parents or religions to try and mould us into accepting their attitudes and values, it is through our own experience of the pain and suffering of life that we come to see that we have a soul that collects experience and grows by it. This is the beginning of awakening. We begin to seek to understand the deeper meaning of our journey.

If one's need is great enough, one aspires to move beyond being at the mercy of a world that seems for a large part submerged in ugliness, falsehood and ignorance. But we have accumulated and constructed around ourselves our own hard shell of thoughts and ideologies that act as a filter to shield us from the intrusions of this very mixed world we find ourselves in. The inner journey now demands that if we are to move further, we must be prepared to break, to let go of this shell, of all these accumulated ideas of good and bad. We are then in a sea of uncertainty in which we either sink or swim according to the extent that we are guided either by someone we have chosen who has gone further on this perilous journey and knows the way or else by our own inner truth. At this stage we still see ourselves as being humans

that have a soul and believe it is by our own efforts and aspiration that we can progress. Our effort in growing is to make the right choices, to seek to unify our whole being around this often submerged inner being. At some point our accumulated experiences can make us ready for Divine Grace to shatter the lid of mind and destroy the illusion that we are the doers.

Our perception of ourselves then undergoes a profound change. We no longer are the selves we thought we were and we discover above the lid of mind that the self we are is wide as the world, as the universe, and timeless. It is one with the Self of existence. It is essentially no longer a case that we are humans with a soul, but souls having (another) human experience. We know from Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's experience that humanity may be on a journey to some other state beyond the human and yet we have begun to know and really value, perhaps for the first time, the true and beautiful human-ness of our human experience. They have also made us see that there is no end to this journey and that it requires us to explore the body, our own human matter, at a more precise and deeper level. We realise that the consciousness can only progress to the extent that not only our minds and feelings are transformed, but our very cells need to consent to transformation. Every trace of darkness and shadow must be hunted from its lair if the light is to possess us utterly. The power of transformation is love itself which is one with light and force. It is, we are, the debate of love and death. This is the lesson of *Savitri*.

VIKAS (ALAN VICKERS)

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.

Sri Aurobindo

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

A NEW EDUCATION FOR A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education

(The first introductory note and the shorter ones preceding each section are by the editors of the compilation.

This compilation was published in 1992.)

The world knows three kinds of revolution. The material has strong results, the moral and intellectual are infinitely larger in their scope and richer in their fruits, but the spiritual are the great sowings. (S13: 210)

It is a spiritual essential change of consciousness, not the surface manipulation which is the method of Mind and Reason, that can alone make Life other than it now is and rescue it out of its present distressed and ambiguous figure.

(S23: 176)

The conditions in which men live on earth are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera. (M12: 39)

Introduction

What extraordinary times we are living in!

History seems to be moving faster than those who are making it. Well-established values are ruthlessly being challenged, and some of them have already collapsed. Our reason is unable to grasp the meaning of the events that are driving us, unable to discover how they fit into Nature's evolutionary plan.

Is there, hidden behind our present upheavals, an Intention that surpasses our understanding? Is there some immense Power that is directing the course of events and setting them in their right place?

For Sri Aurobindo, the answer was clear:

. . . there are particular movements in particular epochs in which the Divine Force manifests itself with supreme power shattering all human calculations, making a mock of the prudence of the careful statesman and the scheming politician, falsifying the prognostications of the scientific analyser and advancing with a vehemence and velocity which is obviously the manifestation

of a higher than human force. . . . These are the times when we say God is in the movement, He is its leader and it must fulfil itself however impossible it may be for man to see the means by which it will succeed. (S8: 111)

Referring to the vast changes he foresaw, Sri Aurobindo once remarked:

The events that sway the world are often the results of trivial circumstances. When immense changes and irresistible movements are in progress, it is astonishing how a single event, often a chance event, will lead to a train of circumstances that alter the face of a country or the world. At such times a slight turn this way or that produces results out of all proportion to the cause. It is on such occasions that we feel most vividly the reality of a Power which disposes of events and defeats the calculations of men. The end of many things is brought about by the sudden act of a single individual. A world vanishes, another is created almost at a touch. Certainty disappears and we begin to realise what the *pralaya* of the Hindus, the passage from one age to another, really means and how true is the idea that it is by rapid transitions long-prepared changes are induced. Such a change now impends all over the world, and in almost all countries events are happening, the final results of which the actors do not foresee. (SABCL 2: 406)

Still, there are clues to guide our baffled intelligence, and we find them exposed in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future. From this perspective, one certainty emerges: the dumbfounding crisis we are witnessing today is not merely a crisis of civilisation but "a crisis of evolution itself".

The evolution of life upon earth, he affirms, is clearly an ascending one. This is shown by the increasing complexity of the forms created throughout the ages, forms better and better equipped to express a growing consciousness.

Man is at present the highest form of life on earth. But the fact that he now stands on the peak of evolution does not mean that the ascent is over. How can a being so painfully limited as man be the final term of the evolutionary endeavour?

Steeped in convention and prejudice, prey to the illusions and delusions of his short-sighted knowledge, man is now battling with the contradictions of his own mental systems. Given his limitations, will he be able to find a way out, or, rather, a way in? Will he be able to control the magnitude and complexity that his outer life has assumed? Will he be able to properly use the secrets of life he has discovered? Or manage an economy expanded to a planetary scale? Or bear the consequences of his exploration of space? These are but a few of the problems whose "universality" is obvious. What of those that man is not yet even aware of?

Sri Aurobindo said:

The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonising light of the spirit, must welter in a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life. (S22: 1091)

Thus, to create a “harmonic life”, man must outgrow his little mind and ego and universalise himself. It is vain to hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature — a change that seems to be “an impossible miracle”. . . .

What a challenge to our poor ratiocinations! If the solution depended on them there would certainly be no hope.

But in fact the “impossibility” exists only for our linear vision. There is a Light and Power of the Spirit, what Sri Aurobindo called the “Supermind”, which presides over the movements of the evolution, and can transform human consciousness and remould life upon earth.

Supermind, explained Sri Aurobindo, is the grade of existence beyond mind, life and matter and as mind, life and matter have manifested on the earth, so too must Supermind in the inevitable course of things manifest in this world of matter.

In fact, a supermind is already here but it is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter and not yet acting overtly or in its own power: if it acts, it is through these inferior powers and modified by their characters and so not yet recognisable. It is only by the approach and arrival of the descending Supermind that it can be liberated upon earth and reveal itself in the action of our material, vital and mental parts so that these lower powers can become portions of a total divinised activity of our whole being: it is that that will bring to us a completely realised divinity or the divine life. (S13: 560)

So the “descending” Supermind had to enter the earth’s atmosphere in order to give a new impetus to the evolution — as it happened so many times before in the course of millenniums, for instance when life began to throb in the inertia of matter, or when mind began to play in the embryonic consciousness of the great apes of the Pleistocene.

In February 1956, as revealed by the Mother, the evolutionary miracle was effected. For the first time, the transforming power of the Supermind manifested itself upon earth.

Nothing would ever be the same again.

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We are now living in an extraordinary period of transition — a transition from an evolution in ignorance to an evolution in the light of the Supermind. This transition will extend over centuries, but the movement has begun and it is irreversible, even if the shattering events we are experiencing today seem to prove the contrary. These are only the vain convulsions of a past that is ended.

“A world vanishes, another is created . . .”

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have cleared the way for us. They have written and spoken extensively to awaken our understanding, they have helped us to face the challenge of the new world to come, and to step into the Future. They have given us the assurance that a vast transformation has begun and that we can participate in it through a change of our own consciousness.

So man will have the privilege of being partly the artisan of his own change. But his conscious consent and consecrated will are needed if what is involved in him is to be revealed by the transforming Power.

If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now for that immense and glorious transformation. (S12: 160)

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The young are privileged in this hour of challenge — privileged because they have their whole lives before them and are less burdened by the weight of the past, because they are still sensitive to the inner voice of the psychic, — the “soul-consciousness” — and can freely consecrate themselves to an ideal.

It is from among the young, said the Mother, that the pioneers of the new world will come. To their ardent aspiration, to their spirit of adventure she has given the call.

But the better one is prepared for a challenge, the better one can face it. That is why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother considered “the education of the future” to be so important. A new education is needed so that the hearts and minds of the young may plunge deliberately into the adventure of tomorrow.

The Mother said:

We are at a decisive hour in the history of the earth. . . . We must boldly on the path of the future despite its new demands. (M16: 429)

What is important in educating young children is to foster and protect the bright spontaneity that makes all learning a joyous discovery. From near to far there is a world of wonders to be explored and each new discovery can be the source of

an inexpressible joy, each opening of the understanding a breath-taking surprise.

If, at the same time, the children are encouraged to develop their instruments of sense and knowledge, the inquirer and explorer hidden in them will soon burst forth and orient the course of their development.

The “wonderful” does not exclude the “rational” — the rational perception of the world expressing itself through laws and functions. The need of the future, however, is not an academic rationality, but a living educative process that allows the child to grasp at every opportunity, every day, the secrets lying in the unexpected flow of life.

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This approach to education is not so difficult to implement if we can free ourselves from certain conventions and preconceived ideas. But it requires, above all, that we remember that the child is a soul, an expression of the Divine, and that his psychic being can guide and inspire him to find just what he needs in order to become what he is.

Sri Aurobindo says:

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 . . . (S25: 33)

This “chance” depends on the progressive freedom given to the child, so that from the depths of his being may rise and manifest the intimations of his true self.

Sri Aurobindo has said that nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as a potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature. And the true purpose of teachers is to show the child “where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface.” (S1: 384)

In this perspective, teaching becomes a complex and subtle art. The teacher must encourage the growth of the child’s mental faculties, but at the same time remain attentive to the deeper needs of his inner being. And he should never forget, as the Mother often stressed, that no two beings are alike.

So if the psychic is allowed to come forward, the child will get into the habit of “listening” consciously to find out the origin of his reactions, impulses, emotions and thoughts. Beyond a certain self-knowledge, he will acquire the strength to master the movements of his nature instead of being blindly carried away by them.

He will discover the subtle relations between the different parts of his being and also learn of unexplored domains where are concealed, in the secrecy of a pregnant silence, other amazing faculties, other ways of knowing and apprehending life.

Science, art, philosophy, history, and his own daily activities will gradually become for him means of perceiving the Divine's workings in life and in himself.

All the aspects of "knowledge" will become part of a vast synthesis in which surface contradictions will be reconciled in the light of a larger truth.

Everything will assume a new and greater significance.

His consciousness will open up to new infinitudes revealing to him the divine destiny of man. A new consciousness will grow up in him — the consciousness of the pioneer of the new world to come.

The Mother said:

What we want to teach is not only a mental ideal, it is a new idea of life and a realisation of consciousness. (M12: 357)

And therefore, what is needed is a new education for a new consciousness.

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*The body is the chrysalis of a soul:
 The infinite holds the finite in its arms,
 Time travels towards revealed eternity.
 A miracle structure of the eternal Mage,
 Matter its mystery hides from its own eyes,
 A scripture written out in cryptic signs,
 An occult document of the All-Wonderful's art.
 All here bears witness to his secret might,
 In all we feel his presence and his power.
 A blaze of his sovereign glory is the sun,
 A glory is the gold and glimmering moon,
 A glory is his dream of purple sky.
 A march of his greatness are the wheeling stars.
 His laughter of beauty breaks out in green trees,
 His moments of beauty triumph in a flower;
 The blue sea's chant, the rivulet's wandering voice
 Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.
 This world is God fulfilled in outwardness.*

(S34: 623-24)

The Perfection of the Body

[If the transformation of life upon earth — and the perfection of our existence which this implies — is the aim of evolution, then a deep change in the functions of our physical body is required — for obviously this human body, enslaved as it is to the needs and instincts of animality, cannot be the evolutionary summit of physical life.

Our cells must open themselves to a new source of life, to the influence of the supramental consciousness.

At present, one of the most effective means of increasing the receptivity of the cells is physical culture.

“Physical culture”, said the Mother, “is the process of infusing consciousness into the cells of the body.” To achieve some degree of mastery in this field, she stressed, is already a great step towards the transformation of the body.

The considerable development of sports and other physical activities throughout the world is a clear indication that Nature’s evolutionary urge is pushing in this direction.

And if to this movement of progressive physical harmonisation, we could add “some spiritual knowledge”, we would come in touch with a power of transformation that is inconceivable to our ordinary thought.]

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The perfection of the body, as great a perfection as we can bring about by the means at our disposal, must be the ultimate aim of physical culture. Perfection is the true aim of all culture, the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also. If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use. *Śarīraṃ khalu dharmasādhanam*, says the old Sanskrit adage, — the body is the means of fulfilment of dharma, and dharma means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out and its action. A total perfection is the ultimate aim which we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine Life which we wish to create here, the life of the Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe. That cannot be unless the body too undergoes a transformation, unless its action and functioning attain to a supreme capacity and the perfection which is possible to it or which can be made possible.

(S13: 521)

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Each time that the soul takes birth in a new body it comes with the intention of having a new experience which will help it to develop and to perfect its personality. This is how the psychic being is formed from life to life and becomes a completely conscious and independent personality [. . .]

Its descent into the physical body is necessarily a descent into darkness, ignorance, unconsciousness; and for a very long time it must labour simply to bring a little consciousness into the material substance of the body, before it can make use of it for the experience it has come for. So, if we cultivate the body by a clear-sighted and rational method, at the same time we are helping the growth of the soul, its progress and enlightenment.

Physical culture is the process of infusing consciousness into the cells of the body. One may or may not know it, but it is a fact. When we concentrate to make our muscles move according to our will, when we endeavour to make our limbs more supple, to give them an agility, or a force, or a resistance, or a plasticity which they do not naturally possess, we infuse into the cells of the body a consciousness which was not there before, thus turning it into an increasingly homogeneous and receptive instrument, which progresses in and by its activities. This is the primary importance of physical culture. Of course, that is not the only thing that brings consciousness into the body, but it is something which acts in an overall way, and this is rare. I have already told you several times that the artist infuses a very great consciousness into his hands, as the intellectual does into his brain. But these are, as it were, local phenomena, whereas the action of physical culture is more general. And when one sees the absolutely marvellous results of this culture, when one observes the extent to which the body is capable of perfecting itself, one understands how useful this can be to the action of the psychic being which has entered into this material substance. For naturally, when it is in possession of an organised and harmonised instrument which is full of strength and suppleness and possibilities, its task is greatly facilitated. (M10: 29-30)

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[Our body is a very sensitive vessel tossed upon the waves of passion and desire, and buffeted by the limiting influences of atavism and collective suggestions.

For anxiety, doubt and scepticism — which pervade the atmosphere in which we live — inhibit the natural faith in the body.

But the body, if not perverted, has its own certitudes.]

[. . .] When one is normal, that is to say, unspoilt by bad teaching and bad example, when one is born and lives in a healthy and relatively balanced and normal environment, the body, spontaneously, without any need for one to intervene mentally or even vitally, has the certitude that even if something goes wrong it will be cured. The body carries within itself the certitude of cure, the certitude that the illness or

disorder is sure to disappear. It is only through the false education from the environment that gradually the body is taught that there are incurable diseases, irreparable accidents, and that it can grow old, and all these stories which destroy its faith and trust. But normally, the body of a normal child — the body, I am not speaking of the thought — the body itself feels when something goes wrong that it will certainly be all right again. And if it is not like that, this means that it has already been perverted. It seems *normal* for it to be in good health, it seems quite abnormal to it if something goes wrong and it falls ill; and in its instinct, its spontaneous instinct, it is sure that everything will be all right. It is only the perversion of thought which destroys this; as one grows up the thought becomes more and more distorted, there is the whole collective suggestion, and so, little by little, the body loses its trust in itself, and naturally, losing its self-confidence, it also loses the spontaneous capacity of restoring its equilibrium when this has been disturbed.

But if when very young, from your earliest childhood, you have been taught all sorts of disappointing, depressing things — things that cause decomposition, I could say, disintegration — then this poor body does its best but it has been perverted, put out of order, and no longer has the sense of its inner strength, its inner force, its power to react.

If one takes care not to pervert it, the body carries within itself the certitude of victory. It is only the wrong use we make of thought and its influence on the body which robs it of this certitude of victory. So, the first thing to do is to cultivate this certitude instead of destroying it; and when it is there, no effort is needed to aspire, but simply a flowering, an unfolding of that inner certitude of victory.

The body carries within itself the sense of its divinity. There. This is what you must try to find again in yourself if you have lost it.

When a child tells you a beautiful dream in which he had many powers and all things were very beautiful, be very careful never to tell him, “Oh! life is not like that”, for you are doing something wrong. You must on the contrary tell him, “Life *ought to be* like that, and *it will be* like that!” (M9: 164-65)

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[. . .] The body has a wonderful capacity of adaptation and endurance. It is able to do so many more things than one usually imagines. If, instead of the ignorant and despotic masters that now govern it, it is ruled by the central truth of the being, you will be amazed at what it is capable of doing. Calm and quiet, strong and poised, at every minute it will be able to put forth the effort that is demanded of it, for it will have learnt to find rest in action and to recuperate, through contact with the universal forces, the energies it expends consciously and usefully. In this sound and balanced life a new harmony will manifest in the body, reflecting the harmony of the higher regions, which will give it perfect proportions and ideal beauty of form. And this

harmony will be progressive, for the truth of the being is never static; it is a perpetual unfolding of a growing perfection that is more and more total and comprehensive. As soon as the body has learnt to follow this movement of progressive harmony, it will be possible for it to escape, through a continuous process of transformation, from the necessity of disintegration and destruction. Thus the irrevocable law of death will no longer have any reason to exist. (M12: 7-8)

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[But however receptive the body, there is an art of living into which every child should be initiated. But who possesses the secrets of this art?]

[. . .] usually you are taught very few things — you are not taught even to sleep. People think that they have only to lie down in their bed and then they sleep. But this is not true! One must learn how to sleep as one must learn to eat, learn to do anything at all. And if one does not learn, well, one does it badly! Or one takes years and years to learn how to do it, and during all those years when it is badly done, all sorts of unpleasant things occur. And it is only after suffering much, making many mistakes, committing many stupidities, that, gradually, when one is old and has white hair, one begins to know how to do something. But if, when you were quite small, your parents or those who look after you, took the trouble to teach you how to do what you do, do it properly as it should be done, in the right way, then that would help you to avoid all — all these mistakes you make through the years. And not only do you make mistakes, but nobody tells you they are mistakes! And so you are surprised that you fall ill, are tired, don't know how to do the things that you wish to do, and that you have never been taught. Some children are not taught anything, and so they need years and years and years to learn the simplest things, even the most elementary thing: to be clean.

It is true that most of the time parents do not teach this because they do not know it themselves! For they themselves did not have anyone to teach them. So they do not know . . . they have groped in the dark all their life to learn how to live. And so naturally they are not in a position to teach you how to live, for they do not know it themselves. If you are left to yourself, you understand, it needs years, years of experience to learn the simplest thing, and even then you must think about it. If you don't think about it, you will never learn.

To live in the right way is a very difficult art, and unless one begins to learn it when quite young and to make an effort, one never knows it very well. Simply the art of keeping one's body in good health, one's mind quiet and goodwill in one's heart — things which are indispensable in order to live decently — I don't say in comfort, I don't say remarkably, I only say decently. Well, I don't think there are many who take care to teach this to their children. (M6: 151-52)

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[. . .] it is very important to remember that the instinct of the body, so long as it remains intact, is more reliable than any theory. Accordingly, those who want their child to develop normally should not force him to eat food which he finds distasteful, for most often the body possesses a sure instinct as to what is harmful to it, unless the child is particularly capricious.

The body in its normal state, that is to say, when there is no intervention of mental notions or vital impulses, also knows very well what is good and necessary for it; but for this to be effective in practice, one must educate the child with care and teach him to distinguish his desires from his needs. [. . .] Children should be given food that suits their temperament, prepared in a way that ensures hygiene and cleanliness, that is pleasant to the taste and yet very simple. This food should be chosen and apportioned according to the age of the child and his regular activities. It should contain all the chemical and dynamic elements that are necessary for his development and the balanced growth of every part of his body. (M12: 13-14)

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Another thing should be taught to a child from his early years: to enjoy cleanliness and observe hygienic habits. But, in obtaining this cleanliness and respect for the rules of hygiene from the child, one must take great care not to instil into him the fear of illness. Fear is the worst instrument of education and the surest way of attracting what is feared. [. . .] In any case, children should be taught to respect health and admire the healthy man whose vigorous body knows how to repel attacks of illness.

(M12: 14)

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[. . .] In the cradle, the baby should sleep longer than he remains awake. The number of hours of sleep will diminish as the child grows. But until maturity it should not be less than eight hours, in a quiet, well-ventilated place. The child should never be made to stay up late for no reason. The hours before midnight are the best for resting the nerves. Even during the waking hours, relaxation is indispensable for all who want to maintain their nervous balance. To know how to relax the muscles and the nerves is an art which should be taught to children when they are very young. There are many parents who, on the contrary, push their child to constant activity. When the child remains quiet, they imagine that he is ill. (M12: 15-16)

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[. . .] Sleep must not be a fall into unconsciousness which makes the body heavy instead of refreshing it. Eating with moderation and abstaining from all excess greatly reduces the need to spend many hours in sleep; however, the quality of sleep is much more important than its quantity. In order to have a truly effective rest and relaxation during sleep, it is good as a rule to drink something before going to bed, a cup of milk or soup or fruit-juice, for instance. Light food brings a quiet sleep. One should, however, abstain from all copious meals, for then the sleep becomes agitated and is disturbed by nightmares, or else is dense, heavy and dulling. But the most important thing of all is to make the mind clear, to quieten the emotions and calm the effervescence of desires and the preoccupations which accompany them. If before retiring to bed one has talked a lot or had a lively discussion, if one has read an exciting or intensely interesting book, one should rest a little without sleeping in order to quieten the mental activity, so that the brain does not engage in disorderly movements while the other parts of the body alone are asleep. Those who practise meditation will do well to concentrate for a few minutes on a lofty and restful idea, in an aspiration towards a higher and vaster consciousness. Their sleep will benefit greatly from this and they will largely be spared the risk of falling into unconsciousness while they sleep. (M12: 52)

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[The transforming action of physical culture must be supported by a rigorous discipline. The more the child knows the structure of his body and its functions, the more effective will this action be.]

Of all the domains of human consciousness, the physical is the one most completely governed by method, order, discipline, process. The lack of plasticity and receptivity in matter has to be replaced by a detailed organisation that is both precise and comprehensive. In this organisation, one must not forget the interdependence and interpenetration of all the domains of the being. However, even a mental or vital impulse, to express itself physically, must submit to an exact process. That is why all education of the body, if it is to be effective, must be rigorous and detailed, far-sighted and methodical. This will be translated into habits; the body is a being of habits.

[. . .] If the child, from the very beginning of his existence, learns good habits, it will save him a good deal of trouble and inconvenience for the rest of his life; and besides, those who have the responsibility of caring for him during his first years will find their task very much easier.

Naturally, this education, if it is to be rational, enlightened and effective, must be based upon a minimum knowledge of the human body, of its structure and its functioning. As the child develops, he must gradually be taught to observe the

functioning of his internal organs so that he may control them more and more, and see that this functioning remains normal and harmonious. (M12: 12-13)

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One must always try a little more, a little better than one did the day before or the previous moment. Only, the more one increases one's effort, the more should one increase one's capacity of receptivity and the opportunities to receive. For instance, from the purely physical point of view, if one wants to develop one's muscles, a progressive effort must be made by them, that is to say, a greater and greater effort, but at the same time one must do what is needed: massage, hydrotherapy, etc. to increase at the same time their capacity to receive.

And rest. A rest which is not a falling into the unconscious — which generally tires you more than it refreshes — but a conscious rest, a concentration in which one opens oneself and absorbs the forces which come, the universal forces.

The limits of the body's possibilities are so elastic! People who undergo a methodical and scientific training, rational, systematic, arrive at absolutely startling results. They demand things from their bodies which, naturally, without training it would be quite impossible to do. And certainly, they must gradually go beyond what they could do, not only from the point of view of perfection, but also from the point of view of strength. If they have that fear of doing more than they are able, of overdoing things, they will never progress. Only, at the same time one must do what is necessary for recuperating. That is the whole principle of physical culture.

(M8: 195-96)

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First, are you conscious of your physical cells and their different characteristics, their activity, the degree of their receptivity, of what is in a healthy condition and what is not? Can you say with certainty when you are tired, why you are tired? When there's something wrong somewhere, can you say, "It is because of this that I am suffering"? . . . Why do people rush to the doctor? Because they are under the illusion that the doctor knows better than they how to look inside their body and find out what's going on there — which is not very reasonable, but still that's the habit! But for oneself, who can look inside himself quite positively and precisely and know exactly what is out of order, why it is disturbed, how it has been disturbed? And all this is simply a work of observation; afterwards one must do what is necessary to put it back into order again, and that is still more difficult.

Well, this is the A B C of the transformation of the body. (M6: 37)

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Each spot of the body is symbolical of an inner movement; there is there a world of subtle correspondences. [. . .] The particular place in the body affected by an illness is an index to the nature of the inner disharmony that has taken place. It points to the origin, it is a sign of the cause of the ailment. It reveals too the nature of the resistance that prevents the whole being from advancing at the same high speed. It indicates the treatment and the cure. If one could perfectly understand where the mistake is, find out what has been unreceptive, open that part and put the force and the light there, it would be possible to re-establish in a moment the harmony that has been disturbed and the illness would immediately go. (M3: 88)

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[Sports play an essential part in a child's education: they not only promote good health and develop physical abilities but also foster self-discipline and, as Sri Aurobindo stressed, "a sound and strong character".

Sports also, he noted, bring out such qualities as "courage, hardihood, energetic action and initiative, steadiness of will, rapid decision and action". Team-spirit, a first step towards collective awareness, is yet another capacity encouraged by the practice of sports.]

Mother, are sports competitions essential to our progress?

From the point of view of moral education they are rather essential, for if one can take part in them in the right spirit, it is a very good opportunity for mastering one's ego. If one does it without trying to overcome one's weaknesses and lower movements, one obviously doesn't know how to profit by them, and it does no good; but if one has the will to play in the right spirit, without any movement of a lower kind, without jealousy or ambition, keeping an attitude which could be called "fair play", that is, doing one's best and not caring about the result; if one can put in the utmost effort without being upset because one has not met with success or things have not turned out in one's favour, then it is very useful. One can come out of all these competitions with a greater self-control and a detachment from results which are a great help to the formation of an exceptional character. Naturally, if you do it in the ordinary way and with all the ordinary reactions and ugly movements, it doesn't help anything at all; but that holds good in no matter what one does; whether in the field of sports or the intellectual field, anywhere, if one acts in the ordinary way, well, one wastes one's time. But if when playing or taking part in tournaments and competitions, you keep the right spirit, it is a very good education, for it compels you to make a special effort and to exceed your ordinary limits a little. It is certainly an opportunity to make conscious many of your movements which otherwise would always remain unconscious.

[. . .] Everything *always* depends on the way in which things are done, not so much on what one does but on the spirit in which one does it. (M9: 97-98)

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All the virtues and skills required to succeed in athletics are exactly those the physical man must have to be fit for receiving and manifesting the new force. (M12: 274)

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[The efficiency of our physical training depends essentially upon the conscious will we put into it.]

[. . .] how is it that the movements we make almost constantly in our everyday life, or which we have to make in our work if it is a physical work, do not help or help very little, almost negligibly, to develop the muscles and to create harmony in the body? These same movements, on the other hand, if they are made consciously, deliberately, with a definite aim, suddenly start helping you to form your muscles and build up your body. There are jobs, for instance, where people have to carry extremely heavy loads, like bags of cement or sacks of corn or coal, and they make a considerable effort; to a certain extent they do it with an acquired facility, but that doesn't give them harmony of the body, because they don't do it with the *idea* of developing their muscles, they do it just "like that". And someone who follows a method, either one he has learnt or one he has worked out for himself, and who makes these very movements with the will to develop this muscle or that, to create a general harmony in his body — he succeeds. Therefore, in the conscious will, there is something which adds considerably to the movement itself. Those who really want to practise physical culture as it is conceived now, everything they do, they do consciously. They walk downstairs consciously, they make the movements of ordinary life consciously, not mechanically. An attentive eye will perhaps notice a little difference but the greatest difference lies in the will they put into it, the consciousness they put into it. (M9: 154-55)

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[As the young explorer grows, he discovers little by little the laws of physical balance and harmony. This new awareness helps him to perceive that all parts of his being are closely connected.]

Why does the body get tired? We have more or less regular activities, but one day we are full of energy and the next day we are quite tired.

Generally this comes from a kind of inner disequilibrium. There may be many reasons for it, but it all comes to this: a sort of disequilibrium between the different parts of the being. Now, it is also possible that the day one had the energy, one spent it too much, though this is not the case with children; children spend it until they can no longer do so. One sees a child active till the moment he suddenly falls fast asleep. He was there, moving, running; and then, all of a sudden, pluff! finished, he is asleep. And it is in this way that he grows up, becomes stronger and stronger. Consequently, it is not the spending that harms you. The expenditure is made up by the necessary rest — that is set right very well. No, it is a disequilibrium: the harmony between the different parts of the being is no longer sufficient.

People think they have only to continue doing for ever what they were doing or at least remain in the same state of consciousness, day after day do their little work, and all will go well. But it is not like that. Suddenly, for some reason or other, one part of the being — either your feelings or your thoughts or your vital — makes progress, has discovered something, received a light, progressed. It takes a leap in progress. All the rest remains behind. This brings about a disequilibrium. That is enough to make you very tired. But in fact, it is not tiredness: it is something which makes you want to keep quiet, to concentrate, remain within yourself, be like that, and build up slowly a new harmony among the different parts of the being. And it is very necessary to have, at a given moment, a sort of rest, for an assimilation of what one has learnt and a harmonisation of the different parts of the being. (M6: 35-36)

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It is said there is a relation between the body and the mind. If the mind is not quite all right, then what?

But certainly there is a relation between the body and the mind! There is even more than a relation: it is a very close tie, for most of the time it is the mind which makes the body ill. In any case, it is the principal factor.

And if the body is not well?

That depends on people, I told you. There are people — as soon as the least thing happens to their body, their mind is completely upset. There are others still who may be very ill and yet keep their mind clear. It is rarer and more difficult to see a mind that's upset and the body remaining healthy — it is not impossible but it is much rarer, for the body depends a great deal on the state of the mind. The mind (I have written it there in the book) is the master of the physical being. And I have said the latter was a very docile and obedient servant. Only one doesn't know how to use one's mind, rather the opposite. Not only does one not know how to use it, but

one uses it ill — as badly as possible. The mind has a considerable power of formation and a direct action on the body, and usually one uses this power to make oneself ill. For as soon as the least thing goes wrong, the mind begins to shape and build all the catastrophes possible, to ask itself whether it could be this, whether it could be that, if it is going to be like that, and how it will all end. Well, if instead of letting the mind do this disastrous work, one used the same capacity to make favourable formations — simply, for example, to give confidence to the body, to tell it that it is just a passing disturbance and that it is nothing, and if it enters a real state of receptivity, the disorder will disappear as easily as it has come, and one can cure oneself in a few seconds — if one knows how to do that, one gets wonderful results.

(M5: 401-02)

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How can one increase the receptivity of the body?

It depends on the part. The method is almost the same for all parts of the being. To begin with, the first condition: to remain as quiet as possible. You may notice that in the different parts of your being, when something comes and you do not receive it, this produces a shrinking — there is something which hardens in the vital, the mind or the body. There is a stiffening and this hurts, one feels a mental, vital or physical pain. So, the first thing is to put one's will and relax this shrinking, as one does a twitching nerve or a cramped muscle; you must learn how to relax, be able to relieve this tension in whatever part of the being it may be.

The method of relaxing the contraction may be different in the mind, the vital or the body, but logically it is the same thing. Once you have relaxed the tension, you see first if the disagreeable effect ceases, which would prove that it was a small momentary resistance, but if the pain continues and if it is indeed necessary to increase the receptivity in order to be able to receive what is helpful, what should be received, you must, after having relaxed this contraction, begin trying to widen yourself — you feel you are widening yourself. There are many methods. Some find it very useful to imagine they are floating on water with a plank under their back. Then they widen themselves, widen, until they become the vast liquid mass. Others make an effort to identify themselves with the sky and the stars, so they widen, widen themselves, identifying themselves more and more with the sky. Others again don't need these pictures; they can become conscious of their consciousness, enlarge their consciousness more and more until it becomes unlimited. One can enlarge it till it becomes vast as the earth and even the universe. When one does that one becomes really receptive. As I have said, it is a question of training.

(M4: 265-66)

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Mother, how can the functioning of the body “attain to a supreme capacity”?

[. . .] all this purely animal functioning of our body, all this part which is exactly the same as in animal life — that we depend for life on the circulation of the blood and to have blood we need to eat, and so on, and all that this implies — these are terrible limitations and bondages! As long as material life depends on that, it is obvious that we won't be able to divinise our life.

So, we must assume that animality in the human being should be replaced by another source of life, and this is quite conceivable — not only conceivable but partially realisable; and this is obviously the aim we ought to set before ourselves if we want to transform matter and make it capable of expressing divine qualities.

In the very, very old traditions — there was a tradition more ancient than the Vedic and the Chaldean which must have been the source of both — in that ancient tradition there is already mention of a “glorious body” which would be plastic enough to be transformed at every moment by the deeper consciousness: it would express that consciousness, it would have no fixity of form. It mentioned luminosity: the constituent matter could become luminous at will. It mentioned a sort of possibility of weightlessness which would allow the body to move about in the air only by the action of will-power and by certain processes of control of the inner energy, and so on. Much has been said about these things.

I don't know if there ever were beings on earth who had partially realised this, but in a very small way there have been partial instances of one thing or another, examples which go to prove that it is possible. And following up this idea, one could go so far as to conceive of the replacement of material organs and their functioning as it now is, by centres of concentration of force and energy which would be receptive to the higher forces and which, by a kind of alchemy, would use them for the necessities of life and the body. We already speak of the different “centres” in the body — this knowledge is very widespread among people who have practised yoga — but these centres could be perfected to the point where they replace the different organs by a direct action of the higher energy and vibrations on matter. Those who have practised occultism well enough, in its most integral form, it could be said, know the process of materialisation of subtle energies and can put them in contact with physical vibrations. Not only is it something that can be done, but it is something which *is* done. And all that is a science, a science which must itself be perfected, completed, and which will obviously be used for the creation and setting in action of new bodies which will be able to manifest the supramental life in the material world.

But, as Sri Aurobindo says, before this can be done, it is good to utilise all that we have in order to increase and make more exact the control of physical activities. It is very obvious that those who practise physical culture scientifically and with coordination acquire a control over their bodies that's unimaginable for ordinary

people. When the Russian gymnasts came here, we saw with what ease they did exercises which for an ordinary man are impossible, and they did them as if it was the simplest thing in the world; there was not even the least sign of effort! Well, that mastery is already a great step towards the transformation of the body. And these people who, I could say, are materialists by profession, used no spiritual method in their education; it was solely by material means and an enlightened use of human will that they had achieved this result. If they had added to this a spiritual knowledge and power, they could have achieved an almost miraculous result. . . . Because of the false ideas prevalent in the world, we don't usually see the two things together, spiritual mastery and material mastery, and so one is always incomplete without the other; but this is exactly what we want to do and what Sri Aurobindo is going to explain: if the two are combined, the result can reach a perfection that's unthinkable for the ordinary human mind, and this is what we want to attempt.

(M9: 85-88)

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One must be able to keep the harmony and the beauty till the end. There is no reason why one should have a body which has no longer any purpose in being, in existing; because it would no longer be good for anything. To be no longer good for anything, that is exactly what makes it disappear. One could have a body that grows from perfection to perfection. [. . .] You see some disharmony somewhere and you say: "If this disharmony disappeared, how much better would it be!". . . But why don't you think that it could be done? If you look at yourself in quite an objective way — not with that sort of attachment one has for one's little person, but quite objectively, — you look at yourself as you would look at another person and tell yourself: "But this thing is not altogether in harmony with that", and if you look yet more closely, it becomes very interesting: you discover that this disharmony is the expression of a defect in your character. It is because in your character there is something a bit twisted, not quite harmonious, and in your body this is reproduced somewhere. You try to arrange it in your body and you find out that to get back to the source of this physical disharmony, you have to find out the defect in your inner being. And then you begin to work and the result is obtained.

You don't know to what an extent the body is plastic! From another standpoint, I would say it is terribly rigid and that is why the body deteriorates. But that is because we do not know how to make use of it. We do not know, when we are still fresh like little leaves, how to will for a luxuriant, magnificent, faultless flowering.

(M5: 113-14)

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[The perception of an underlying harmony in life and of its influence upon us will lead the child to seek for beauty, to express it in his thoughts, feelings and actions.]

The great importance of beauty must also be emphasised. A young child should aspire for beauty, not for the sake of pleasing others or winning their admiration, but for the love of beauty itself; for beauty is the ideal which all physical life must realise. Every human being has the possibility of establishing harmony among the different parts of his body and in the various movements of the body in action. Every human body that undergoes a rational method of culture from the very beginning of its existence can realise its own harmony and thus become fit to manifest beauty. (M12: 16-17)

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[. . .] in each part of the being the Divine manifests Himself differently. In the higher parts He manifests as Power, Love, etc., but in the physical He manifests as Harmony and Beauty.

Hence, the problem of the expression of physical beauty is a spiritual problem.

(M4: 56-57)

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[Our body is an instrument of our consciousness. Therefore, the change of our body is closely linked with the change of our consciousness.]

[. . .] the method we use to deal with our body, maintain it, keep it fit, improve it and keep it in good health, depends *exclusively* on the state of consciousness we are in; for our body is an instrument of our consciousness and this consciousness can act directly on it and obtain what it wants from it.

So, if you are in an ordinary physical consciousness, if you see things with the eyes of the ordinary physical consciousness, if you think of them with the ordinary physical consciousness, it will be ordinary physical means you will have to use to act on your body. These ordinary physical means make up the whole science which has accumulated through thousands of years of human existence. This science is very complex, its processes innumerable, complicated, uncertain, often contradictory, always progressive and almost absolutely relative! Still, very precise results have been achieved; ever since physical culture has become a serious preoccupation, a certain number of experiments, studies, observations have accumulated, which enable us to regulate diet, activities, exercise, the whole outer organisation of life,

and provide an adequate basis so that those who make the effort to study and conform strictly to these things have a chance to maintain their body in good health, correct the defects it may have and improve its general condition, and even achieve results which are sometimes quite remarkable.

I may add, moreover, that this intellectual human science, such as it is at present, in its very sincere effort to find the truth, is, surprisingly enough, drawing closer and closer to the essential truth of the Spirit. It is not impossible to foresee the movement where the two will unite in a very deep and very close understanding of the essential truth.

So, for all those who live on the physical plane, in the physical consciousness, it is physical means and processes which have to be used in dealing with the body. [. . .]

Now, according to what Sri Aurobindo teaches us, this is not a final realisation, nor is it the ideal to which we want to rise. There is a higher state than this, in which the consciousness, though it still remains principally mental or partially mental in its functioning, is already open to higher regions in an aspiration for the spiritual life, and open to the supramental influence.

As soon as this opening occurs, one passes beyond the state in which life is purely physical — when I say “physical” I include the whole mental and intellectual life and all human achievements, even the most remarkable; I am speaking of a physical which is the summit of human capacities, of an earthly and material life in which man can express values of a higher order from the mental and intellectual point of view — one can go beyond that state, open oneself to the supramental force which is now acting on earth and enter a transitional zone where the two influences meet and interpenetrate, where the consciousness is still mental and intellectual in its functioning, but sufficiently imbued with the supramental strength and force to become the instrument of a higher truth.

At present this state can be realised on earth by those who have prepared themselves to receive the supramental force which is manifesting. And in that state, in that state of consciousness, the body can benefit from a much better condition than the one it was in before. It can be put into direct contact with the essential truth of its being, to the extent that, *spontaneously*, at every moment it knows instinctively, or intuitively, what is to be done and that it can do it.

As I say, this state can now be realised by all those who take the trouble of preparing themselves to receive the supramental force, to assimilate it and obey it.

Of course, there is a higher state than this, the state Sri Aurobindo speaks of as the ideal to be fulfilled: the divine life in a divine body. But he himself tells us that this will take time; it is an integral transformation which cannot be achieved in a moment. It will even take quite a long time. But when it is accomplished, when the consciousness has become a supramental consciousness, then action will no longer be determined at every moment by a mental choice or be dependent on the physical

capacity: the entire body will spontaneously, integrally, be the perfect expression of the inner truth.

This is the ideal we must keep before us, for the realisation of which we must strive; but we must not delude ourselves and think that it can be a rapid transformation, miraculous, immediate, marvellous, without effort and without labour.

However, it is no longer only a possibility, it is no longer even only a promise for a far-off future: it is something which is in the making. And already one can not only foresee but feel the moment when the body will be able to repeat integrally the experience of the most spiritual part of the being, as the inner spirit has already done, and will itself be able to stand in its bodily consciousness before the supreme Reality, turn to it integrally and say in all sincerity, in a total self-giving of all its cells: "To be Thyself — exclusively, perfectly — Thyself, infinitely, eternally . . . very simply." (M9: 109-12)

(To be continued)

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What is necessary is an aspiration which burns in the being like a constant fire, and every time you have a desire, a preference, an attraction it must be thrown into this fire. If you do this persistently, you will see that a little gleam of true consciousness begins to dawn in your ordinary consciousness. At first it will be faint, very far behind all the din of desires, preferences, attractions, likings. But you must go behind all this and find that true consciousness, all calm, tranquil, almost silent.

The Mother

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