

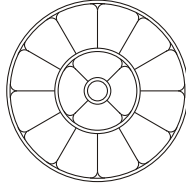
THE MOTHER

Questions and Answers
1929-1931

Questions and Answers 1929–1931

with

Commentaries on the Dhammapada



The Mother

Questions and Answers
1929 - 1931
with
Commentaries on the Dhammapada

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

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The Mother in Tokyo, 1917

Publisher's Note

This volume includes two early collections of conversations by the Mother and her oral commentaries on the *Dhammapada*. The conversations were spoken in English; the commentaries were spoken in French and appear here in English translation.

Questions and Answers 1929. In 1929 the Mother met weekly with a small group of disciples. After a period of meditation she answered questions raised by them. Most of these questions were asked by an Englishwoman who was living in the Ashram at that time. One of those present noted down the conversations immediately afterwards and later sent a copy of fifteen of them to Sri Aurobindo, who revised them for publication. They were first brought out for private circulation in 1931.

Questions and Answers 1930-1931. During 1930 and 1931 the Mother spoke with a group of disciples who met with her in a room of the Ashram known as Prosperity. One of the participants recorded some of these conversations in abbreviated long-hand and later elaborated his notes. These reports were not revised by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, but the Mother did approve of their publication and made a French translation. They were first published as a book in 1951.

Commentaries on the *Dhammapada*. The Mother gave these commentaries on the Buddhist teachings of the *Dhammapada* between August 1957 and September 1958. She was speaking to a large gathering of Ashram members and students of the Ashram school, members of her "Friday class" at the Ashram Playground. After reading out a chapter of the text, the Mother spoke about the points that interested her and then asked the class to meditate on them. She did not comment systematically

on the *Dhammapada* verses, but she did cover most of the central ideas of the text.

Appendix to *Questions and Answers 1929*. This appendix contains Sri Aurobindo's explanations of certain phrases and passages in *Questions and Answers 1929*. They were written to various disciples between 1933 and 1937.

Details about these texts and their publication are provided in the Note on the Texts.

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Questions and Answers

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Will you say something to us about Yoga?

What do you want the Yoga for? To get power? To attain to peace and calm? To serve humanity?

None of these motives is sufficient to show that you are meant for the Path.

The question you are to answer is this: Do you want the Yoga for the sake of the Divine? Is the Divine the supreme fact of your life, so much so that it is simply impossible for you to do without it? Do you feel that your very *raison d'être* is the Divine and without it there is no meaning in your existence? If so, then only can it be said that you have a call for the Path.

This is the first thing necessary — aspiration for the Divine.

The next thing you have to do is to tend it, to keep it always alert and awake and living. And for that what is required is concentration — concentration upon the Divine with a view to an integral and absolute consecration to its Will and Purpose.

Concentrate in the heart. Enter into it; go within and deep and far, as far as you can. Gather all the strings of your consciousness that are spread abroad, roll them up and take a plunge and sink down.

A fire is burning there, in the deep quietude of the heart. It is the divinity in you — your true being. Hear its voice, follow its dictates.

There are other centres of concentration, for example, one above the crown and another between the eye-brows. Each has its own efficacy and will give you a particular result. But the central being lies in the heart and from the heart proceed all central movements — all dynamism and urge for transformation and power of realisation.

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What is one to do to prepare oneself for the Yoga?

To be conscious, first of all. We are conscious of only an insignificant portion of our being; for the most part we are unconscious. It is this unconsciousness that keeps us down to our unregenerate nature and prevents change and transformation in it. It is through unconsciousness that the undivine forces enter into us and make us their slaves. You are to be conscious of yourself, you must awake to your nature and movements, you must know why and how you do things or feel or think them; you must understand your motives and impulses, the forces, hidden and apparent, that move you; in fact, you must, as it were, take to pieces the entire machinery of your being. Once you are conscious, it means that you can distinguish and sift things, you can see which are the forces that pull you down and which help you on. And when you know the right from the wrong, the true from the false, the divine from the undivine, you are to act strictly up to your knowledge; that is to say, resolutely reject one and accept the other. The duality will present itself at every step and at every step you will have to make your choice. You will have to be patient and persistent and vigilant — “sleepless”, as the adepts say; you must always refuse to give any chance whatever to the undivine against the divine.

Is the Yoga for the sake of humanity?

No, it is for the sake of Divinity. It is not the welfare of humanity that we seek but the manifestation of the Divine. We are here to work out the Divine Will, more truly, to be worked upon by the Divine Will so that we may be its instruments for the progressive incorporation of the Supreme and the establishment of His reign upon earth. Only that portion of humanity which will respond to the Divine Call shall receive its Grace.

Whether humanity as a whole will be benefited, if not directly, at least, in an indirect way, will depend upon the condition

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of humanity itself. If one is to judge from the present conditions, there is not much hope. What is the attitude today of the average man — the representative humanity? Does he not rise in anger and revolt directly he meets something that partakes of the genuinely divine? Does he not feel that the Divine means the destruction of his cherished possessions? Is he not continually yelling out the most categorical negative to everything that the Divine intends and wills? Humanity will have to change much before it can hope to gain anything by the advent of the Divine.

How is that we have met?

We have all met in previous lives. Otherwise we would not have come together in this life. We are of one family and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine and its manifestation upon earth.

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What are the dangers of Yoga? Is it especially dangerous to the people of the West? Someone has said that Yoga may be suitable for the East, but it has the effect of unbalancing the Western mind.

Yoga is not more dangerous to the people of the West than to those of the East. Everything depends upon the spirit with which you approach it. Yoga does become dangerous if you want it for your own sake, to serve a personal end. It is not dangerous, on the contrary, it is safety and security itself, if you go to it with a sense of its sacredness, always remembering that the aim is to find the Divine.

Dangers and difficulties come in when people take up Yoga not for the sake of the Divine, but because they want to acquire power and under the guise of Yoga seek to satisfy some ambition. If you cannot get rid of ambition, do not touch the thing. It is fire that burns.

There are two paths of Yoga, one of *tapasyā* (discipline), and the other of surrender. The path of *tapasyā* is arduous. Here you rely solely upon yourself, you proceed by your own strength. You ascend and achieve according to the measure of your force. There is always the danger of falling down. And once you fall, you lie broken in the abyss and there is hardly a remedy. The other path, the path of surrender, is safe and sure. It is here, however, that the Western people find their difficulty. They have been taught to fear and avoid all that threatens their personal independence. They have imbibed with their mothers' milk the sense of individuality. And surrender means giving up all that. In other words, you may follow, as Ramakrishna says, either the path of the baby monkey or that of the baby cat. The baby monkey holds to its mother in order to be carried about and it

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must hold firm, otherwise if it loses its grip, it falls. On the other hand, the baby cat does not hold to its mother, but is held by the mother and has no fear nor responsibility; it has nothing to do but to let the mother hold it and cry *ma ma*.

If you take up this path of surrender fully and sincerely, there is no more danger or serious difficulty. The question is to be sincere. If you are not sincere, do not begin Yoga. If you were dealing in human affairs, then you could resort to deception; but in dealing with the Divine there is no possibility of deception anywhere. You can go on the Path safely when you are candid and open to the core and when your only end is to realise and attain the Divine and to be moved by the Divine.

There is another danger; it is in connection with the sex impulses. Yoga in its process of purification will lay bare and throw up all hidden impulses and desires in you. And you must learn not to hide things nor leave them aside, you have to face them and conquer and remould them. The first effect of Yoga, however, is to take away the mental control, and the hungers that lie dormant are suddenly set free, they rush up and invade the being. So long as this mental control has not been replaced by the Divine control, there is a period of transition when your sincerity and surrender will be put to the test. The strength of such impulses as those of sex lies usually in the fact that people take too much notice of them; they protest too vehemently and endeavour to control them by coercion, hold them within and sit upon them. But the more you think of a thing and say, "I don't want it, I don't want it", the more you are bound to it. What you should do is to keep the thing away from you, to dissociate from it, take as little notice of it as possible and, even if you happen to think of it, remain indifferent and unconcerned.

The impulses and desires that come up by the pressure of Yoga should be faced in a spirit of detachment and serenity, as something foreign to yourself or belonging to the outside world. They should be offered to the Divine, so that the Divine may take them up and transmute them.

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If you have once opened yourself to the Divine, if the power of the Divine has once come down into you and yet you try to keep to the old forces, you prepare troubles and difficulties and dangers for yourself. You must be vigilant and see that you do not use the Divine as a cloak for the satisfaction of your desires. There are many self-appointed Masters, who do nothing but that. And then when you are off the straight path and when you have a little knowledge and not much power, it happens that you are seized by beings or entities of a certain type, you become blind instruments in their hands and are devoured by them in the end. Wherever there is pretence, there is danger; you cannot deceive God. Do you come to God saying, "I want union with you" and in your heart meaning "I want powers and enjoyments"? Beware! You are heading straight towards the brink of the precipice. And yet it is so easy to avoid all catastrophe. Become like a child, give yourself up to the Mother, let her carry you, and there is no more danger for you.

This does not mean that you have not to face other kinds of difficulties or that you have not to fight and conquer any obstacles at all. Surrender does not ensure a smooth and unruffled and continuous progression. The reason is that your being is not yet one, nor your surrender absolute and complete. Only a part of you surrenders; and today it is one part and the next day it is another. The whole purpose of the Yoga is to gather all the divergent parts together and forge them into an undivided unity. Till then you cannot hope to be without difficulties — difficulties, for example, like doubt or depression or hesitation. The whole world is full of the poison. You take it in with every breath. If you exchange a few words with an undesirable man or even if such a man merely passes by you, you may catch the contagion from him. It is sufficient for you to come near a place where there is plague in order to be infected with its poison; you need not know at all that it is there. You can lose in a few minutes what it has taken you months to gain. So long as you belong to humanity and so long as you lead the ordinary life, it

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does not matter much if you mix with the people of the world; but if you want the divine life, you will have to be exceedingly careful about your company and your environment.

What is the way to establish unity and homogeneity in our being?

Keep the will firm. Treat the recalcitrant parts as disobedient children. Act upon them constantly and patiently. Convince them of their error.

In the depths of your consciousness is the psychic being, the temple of the Divine within you. This is the centre round which should come about the unification of all these divergent parts, all these contradictory movements of your being. Once you have got the consciousness of the psychic being and its aspiration, these doubts and difficulties can be destroyed. It takes more or less time, but you will surely succeed in the end. Once you have turned to the Divine, saying, "I want to be yours", and the Divine has said, "Yes", the whole world cannot keep you from it. When the central being has made its surrender, the chief difficulty has disappeared. The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, "I am here and I am yours", then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.

Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis. That canker can hide long. Many people start on the Path without any sense of it. But when they get powers, their ambition rises up, all the more violently because it had not been thrown out in the beginning.

A story is told of a Yogi who had attained wonderful powers. He was invited by his disciples to a great dinner. It was served on a big low table. The disciples asked their Master to show

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his power in some way. He knew he should not, but the seed of ambition was there in him and he thought, "After all, it is a very innocent thing and it may prove to them that such things are possible and teach them the greatness of God." So he said, "Take away the table, but only the table, let the table-cloth remain as it is with all the dishes upon it." The disciples cried out, "Oh, that cannot be done, everything will fall down." But he insisted and they removed the table from under the cloth. Lo, the miracle! The cloth and all that was upon it remained there just as though the table was underneath. The disciples wondered. But all on a sudden the Master jumped up and rushed out screaming and crying, "Nevermore shall I have a disciple, nevermore! Woe is me! I have betrayed my God." His heart was on fire; he had used the divine powers for selfish ends.

It is always wrong to display powers. This does not mean that there is no use for them. But they have to be used in the same way as they came. They come by union with the Divine. They must be used by the will of the Divine and not for display. If you come across someone who is blind and you have the power to make him see — if it is the Divine Will that the man shall see, you have only to say, "Let him see" and he will see. But if you wish to make him see simply because you want to cure him, then you use the power to satisfy your personal ambition. Most often, in such cases, you not only lose your power but you create a great disturbance in the man. Yet in appearance the two ways are the same; but in one case you act because of the Divine Will and in the other for some personal motive.

How are we to know, you will ask, when it is the Divine Will that makes us act? The Divine Will is not difficult to recognise. It is unmistakable. You can know it without being very far on the path. Only you must listen to its voice, the small voice that is here in the heart. Once you are accustomed to listen, if you do anything that is contrary to the Divine Will, you feel an uneasiness. If you persist on the wrong track, you get very much disturbed. If, however, you give some material excuse as

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the cause of your uneasiness and proceed on your way, you gradually lose the faculty of perception and finally you may go on doing all kinds of wrong and feel no uneasiness. But if, when once you feel the least disturbance, you stop and ask of your inner self, "What is the cause of this?" then you do get the real answer and the whole thing becomes quite clear. Do not try to give a material excuse when you feel a little depression or a slight uneasiness. When you stop and look about for the reason, be absolutely straight and sincere. At first your mind will construct a very plausible and beautiful explanation. Do not accept it, but look beyond and ask, "What is it that is behind this movement? Why am I doing this?" Finally you will discover, hidden in a corner, the little ripple — a slight wrong turn or twist in your attitude that is causing the trouble or disturbance.

One of the commonest forms of ambition is the idea of service to humanity. All attachment to such service or work is a sign of personal ambition. The Guru who believes that he has a great truth to teach to humanity and who wants many disciples and who feels uncomfortable when the disciples go away or who seizes on anybody that comes and tries to make him a disciple, is evidently following nothing but his ambition. You must be able, if you are ready to follow the divine order, to take up whatever work you are given, even a stupendous work, and leave it the next day with the same quietness with which you took it up and not feel that the responsibility is yours. There should be no attachment — to any object or any mode of life. You must be absolutely free. If you want to have the true yogic attitude, you must be able to accept everything that comes from the Divine and let it go easily and without regret. The attitude of the ascetic who says, "I want nothing" and the attitude of the man of the world who says, "I want this thing" are the same. The one may be as much attached to his renunciation as the other to his possession.

You must accept all things — and only those things — that come from the Divine. Because things can come from concealed

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desires. The desires work in the subconscious and bring things to you which, although you may not recognise them as such, nevertheless do not come from the Divine but from disguised desires.

You can easily know when a thing comes from the Divine. You feel free, you are at ease, you are in peace. But when something presents itself to you and you jump at it and cry out, "Oh, at last I have it", then you can know for certain that it does not come from the Divine. Equanimity is the essential condition of union and communion with the Divine.

Does not the Divine sometimes give what you desire?

Certainly. There was a young man who wanted to do Yoga. But he had a mean and cruel father who troubled him very much and tried to prevent him from doing it. He wished ardently to be free from the father's interference. Soon the father fell ill and very seriously; he was about to die. Whereupon the other side of the boy's nature rose up and he loudly bewailed the misfortune and cried, "Oh, my poor father is so ill! It is such a sad thing. Alas, what shall I do?" The father got well. The young man rejoiced and turned once more to Yoga. And the father also began again to oppose and torment him with redoubled violence. The son tore his hair in despair and cried, "Now my father stands in my way more than ever." The whole thing is to know exactly what one wants.

The Divine always brings with it perfect calm and peace. A certain class of Bhaktas, it is true, present generally a very different picture; they jump about and cry and laugh and sing, in a fit of devotion, as they say. But in reality such people do not live in the Divine. They live largely in the vital world.

You say that even Ramakrishna had periods of emotional excitement and would go about with hands uplifted, singing and dancing? The truth of the matter is this. The movement in the inner being may be perfect; but it puts you in a certain condition

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of receptivity to forces that fill you with intense emotional excitement, if your external being is weak or untransformed. Where the external being offers resistance to the inner being or cannot hold the entirety of the Ananda, there is this confusion and anarchy in expression.

You must have a strong body and strong nerves. You must have a strong basis of equanimity in your external being. If you have this basis, you can contain a world of emotion and yet not have to scream it out. This does not mean that you cannot express your emotion, but you can express it in a beautiful harmonious way. To weep or scream or dance about is always a proof of weakness, either of the vital or the mental or the physical nature; for on all these levels the activity is for self-satisfaction. One who dances and jumps and screams has the feeling that he is somehow very unusual in his excitement; and his vital nature takes great pleasure in that.

If you have to bear the pressure of the Divine Descent, you must be very strong and powerful, otherwise you would be shaken to pieces. Some persons ask, "Why has not the Divine come yet?" Because you are not ready. If a little drop makes you sing and dance and scream, what would happen if the whole thing came down?

Therefore do we say to people who have not a strong and firm and capacious basis in the body and the vital and the mind, "Do not pull", meaning "Do not try to pull at the forces of the Divine, but wait in peace and calmness." For they would not be able to bear the descent. But to those who possess the necessary basis and foundation we say, on the contrary, "Aspire and draw." For they would be able to receive and yet not be upset by the forces descending from the Divine.

In the case of some persons who turn to the Divine it happens that every material prop or everything they are fond of is removed from their life. And if they love someone, he also is taken away.

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It is a thing that does not happen to all. It happens to those that are called.

Whatever difference there is between the West and the East in relation to spiritual life lies not in the inner being or nature, which is an invariable and constant thing, but in the mental habits, in the modes of outer expression and presentation which are the result of education and environment and other external conditions. All people, whether occidental or oriental, are alike in their deepest feelings; they are different in their way of thinking. Sincerity, for example, is a quality which is the same everywhere. Those who are sincere, to whichever nation they belong, are all sincere in the same way. Only the forms given to this sincerity vary. The mind works in different ways in different peoples, but the heart is the same everywhere; the heart is a much truer reality, and the differences belong to the superficial parts. As soon as you go deep enough, you meet something that is one in all. All meet in the Divine. The sun is the symbol of the Divine in the physical nature. Clouds may modify its appearance, but when they are no longer there, you see it is the same sun always and everywhere.

If you cannot feel one with somebody, it means you have not gone deep enough in your feeling.

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There is a common idea that visions are a sign of high spirituality. Is this true?

Not necessarily. Moreover, to see is one thing but to understand and interpret what is seen is quite another thing and much more difficult. Generally, those who see are misled because they give the meaning or interpretation they wish to give according to their desires, hopes and prepossessions. And then, too, there are many different planes in which you can see. There is a mental seeing, a vital seeing, and there are some visions that are seen in a plane very close to the most material. The visions that belong to the last category appear in forms and symbols that seem to be absolutely material, so clear and real and tangible they are. And if you know how to interpret them you can have very exact indications of circumstances and of the inner condition of people.

Let us illustrate. Here is a vision that someone actually had. A road climbs up a steep and precipitous hillside, bathed in full bright sunlight. On the road a heavy coach drawn by six strong horses is proceeding with great difficulty; it is advancing slowly but steadily. Arrives a man who looks over the situation, takes his position behind the coach and begins to push it or tries to push it up the hill. Then someone comes who has knowledge and says to him, "Why do you labour in vain? Do you think your effort can have any effect? For you it is an impossible task. Even the horses find it difficult."

Now the clue to the meaning of the vision lies in the image of the six horses. Horses are symbols of power and the number six represents divine creation; so the six horses signify the powers of divine creation. The coach stands for realisation, for the thing that has to be realised, achieved, brought up to the

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summit, to the height where dwells the Light. Although these powers of creation are divine, it is a hard labour even for them to consummate the realisation; for they have to work against heavy odds, against the whole downward pull of nature. Then comes in the human being in his arrogance and ignorance, with his small fund of mental powers and thinks that he is somebody and can do something. The best thing he can do is to step inside the coach, sit down comfortably and let the horses carry him.

Dreams are quite a different thing. They are more difficult to interpret, since each person has his own world of dream-imagery peculiar to himself. Of course, there are dreams that do not signify much, those that are connected with the most superficial and physical layer of consciousness, those that are the result of stray thoughts, random impressions, mechanical reactions or reflex activities. These have no regular or organised form and shape and meaning; they are hardly remembered and leave almost no trace in the consciousness. But even dreams that have a somewhat deeper origin are still obscure, since they are peculiarly personal, in this sense that they depend for their make-up almost entirely upon the experiences and idiosyncrasies of the individual. Visions also are made up of symbols that do not necessarily obtain universal currency. The symbols vary according to race and tradition and religion. One symbol may be peculiarly Christian, another peculiarly Hindu, a third may be common to all the East and a fourth only to the West. Dreams, on the other hand, are exclusively personal; they depend upon everyday occurrences and impressions. It is exceedingly difficult for one man to explain or interpret another's dream. Each man is like a closed circle to every other man. But everyone can study for himself his own dreams, unravel them and find out their meaning.

Now the procedure to deal with dreams and the dreamland. First become conscious — conscious of your dreams. Observe the relation between them and the happenings of your waking hours. If you remember your night, you will be able to trace

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back very often the condition of your day to the condition of your night. In sleep some action or other is always going on in your mental or vital or other plane; things happen there and they govern your waking consciousness. For instance, some are very anxious to perfect themselves and make a great effort during the day. They go to sleep and, when they rise the next day, they find no trace of the gains of their previous day's effort; they have to go over the same ground once again. This means that the effort and whatever achievement there was belonged to the more superficial or wakeful parts of the being, but there were deeper and dormant parts that were not touched. In sleep you fell into the grip of these unconscious regions and they opened and swallowed all that you had laboriously built up in your conscious hours.

Be conscious! Be conscious of the night as well as of the day. First you have to get consciousness, afterwards, control. You who remember your dreams may have had this experience that, even while dreaming, you knew it was a dream; you knew that it was an experience that did not belong to the material world. When once you know, you can act there in the same way as in the material world; even in the dreaming, you can exercise your conscious will and change the whole course of your dream-experience.

And as you become more and more conscious, you will begin to have the same control over your being at night as you have in the day, perhaps even more. For at night you are free, at least partially, from slavery to the mechanism of the body. The control over the processes of the body-consciousness is more difficult, since they are more rigid, less amenable to change than are the mental or the vital processes.

In the night the mental and vital, especially the vital, are very active. During the day they are under check, the physical consciousness automatically represses their free play and expression. In sleep this check is removed and they come out with their natural and free movements.

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What is the nature of dreamless sleep?

Generally, when you have what you call dreamless sleep, it is one of two things; either you do not remember what you dreamt or you fell into absolute unconsciousness which is almost death—a taste of death. But there is the possibility of a sleep in which you enter into an absolute silence, immobility and peace in all parts of your being and your consciousness merges into Sachchidananda. You can hardly call it sleep, for it is extremely conscious. In that condition you may remain for a few minutes, but these few minutes give you more rest and refreshment than hours of ordinary sleep. You cannot have it by chance; it requires a long training.

How is it that in dreams one meets and knows people whom one meets and knows afterwards in the outer world?

It is because of the affinities that draw certain people together, affinities in the mental or the vital world. People often meet in these planes before they meet upon earth. They may join there, speak to each other and have all the relations you can have upon earth. Some know of these relationships, some do not know. Some, as are indeed most, are unconscious of the inner being and the inner intercourse, and yet it will happen that, when they meet the new face in the outer world, they find it somehow very familiar, quite well-known.

Are there no false visions?

There are what in appearance are false visions. There are, for instance, hundreds or thousands of people who say that they have seen the Christ. Of that number those who have actually seen Him are perhaps less than a dozen, and even with them there is much to say about what they have seen. What the others saw

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may be an emanation; or it may be a thought or even an image remembered by the mind. There are, too, those who are strong believers in the Christ and have had a vision of some Force or Being or some remembered image that is very luminous and makes upon them a strong impression. They have seen something which they feel belongs to another world, to a supernatural order, and it has created in them an emotion of fear, awe or joy; and as they believe in the Christ, they can think of nothing else and say it is He. But the same vision or experience if it comes to one who believes in the Hindu, the Mohammedan or some other religion, will take a different name and form. The thing seen or experienced may be fundamentally the same, but it is formulated differently according to the different make-up of the apprehending mind. It is only those that can go beyond beliefs and faiths and myths and traditions who are able to say what it really is; but these are few, very few. You must be free from every mental construction, you must divest yourself of all that is merely local or temporal, before you can know what you have seen.

Spiritual experience means the contact with the Divine in oneself (or without, which comes to the same thing in that domain). And it is an experience identical everywhere in all countries, among all peoples and even in all ages. If you meet the Divine, you meet it always and everywhere in the same way. Difference comes in because between the experience and its formulation there is almost an abyss. Directly you have spiritual experience, which takes place always in the inner consciousness, it is translated into your external consciousness and defined there in one way or another according to your education, your faith, your mental predisposition. There is only one truth, one reality; but the forms through which it may be expressed are many.

What was the nature of Jeanne d'Arc's vision?

Jeanne d'Arc was evidently in relation with some entities belonging to what we call the world of the Gods (or as the Catholics

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say, the world of the Saints, though it is not quite the same). The beings she saw she called archangels. These beings belong to the intermediate world between the higher mind and the supramental, the world that Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind. It is the world of the creators, the “Formateurs”.

The two beings who were always appearing and speaking to Jeanne d’Arc would, if seen by an Indian, have a quite different appearance; for when one sees, one projects the forms of one’s mind. To what you see you give the form of that which you expect to see. If the same being appeared simultaneously in a group where there were Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Shintoists, it would be named by absolutely different names. Each would say, in reference to the appearance of the being, that he was like this or like that, all differing and yet it would be one and the same manifestation. You have the vision of one in India whom you call the Divine Mother, the Catholics say it is the Virgin Mary, and the Japanese call it Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy, and others would give other names. It is the same Force, the same Power, but the images made of it are different in different faiths.

*What is the place of training or discipline in surrender?
If one surrenders, can he not be without discipline? Does
not discipline sometimes hamper?*

Maybe. But a distinction must be made between a method of development or discipline and a willed action. Discipline is different; I am speaking of willed action. If you surrender you have to give up effort, but that does not mean that you have to abandon also all willed action. On the contrary, you can hasten the realisation by lending your will to the Divine Will. That too is surrender in another form.

What is required of you is not a passive surrender, in which you become like a block, but to put your will at the disposal of the Divine Will.

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But how can one do this before the union has been effected?

You have a will and you can offer that will. Take the example of becoming conscious of your nights. If you take the attitude of passive surrender, you would say, "When it is the Divine Will that I should become conscious, then I shall become conscious." On the other hand, if you offer your will to the Divine, you begin to will, you say, "I will become conscious of my nights." You have the will that it should be done; you do not sit down idle and wait. The surrender comes in when you take the attitude that says, "I give my will to the Divine. I intensely want to become conscious of my nights, I have not the knowledge, let the Divine Will work it out for me." Your will must continue to act steadily, not in the way of choosing a particular action or demanding a particular object, but as an ardent aspiration concentrated upon the end to be achieved. This is the first step. If you are vigilant, if your attention is alert, you will certainly receive something in the form of an inspiration of what is to be done and that you must forthwith proceed to do. Only, you must remember that to surrender is to accept whatever is the result of your action, though the result may be quite different from what you expect. On the other hand, if your surrender is passive, you will do nothing and try nothing; you will simply go to sleep and wait for a miracle.

Now to know whether your will or desire is in agreement with the Divine Will or not, you must look and see whether you have an answer or have no answer, whether you feel supported or contradicted, not by the mind or the vital or the body, but by that something which is always there deep in the inner being, in your heart.

Is not an increasing effort of meditation needed and is it not true that the more hours you meditate the greater progress you make?

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The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. It is a proof of your progress when you no longer have to make an effort to meditate. Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditating: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness. Then you are sure of progress, then you have made real progress when concentration in the Divine is the necessity of your life, when you cannot do without it, when it continues naturally from morning to night whatever you may be engaged in doing. Whether you sit down to meditation or go about and do things and work, what is required of you is consciousness; that is the one need, — to be constantly conscious of the Divine.

But is not sitting down to meditation an indispensable discipline, and does it not give a more intense and concentrated union with the Divine?

That may be. But a discipline in itself is not what we are seeking. What we are seeking is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement. There are some here who have been told to meditate; but also there are others who have not been asked to do any meditation at all. But it must not be thought that they are not progressing. They too follow a discipline, but it is of another nature. To work, to act with devotion and an inner consecration is also a spiritual discipline. The final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation but in all circumstances and in all the active life.

There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful. They sit self-complacent in it and forget the world; but if they are disturbed, they come out of it angry and restless, because their meditation was interrupted. This is not a sign of spiritual progress or discipline. There are some people who act and seem to feel as

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if their meditation were a debt they have to pay to the Divine; they are like men who go to church once a week and think they have paid what they owe to God.

If you need to make an effort to go into meditation, you are still very far from being able to live the spiritual life. When it takes an effort to come out of it, then indeed your meditation can be an indication that you are in the spiritual life.

There are disciplines such as Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga that one can practise and yet have nothing to do with the spiritual life; the former arrives mostly at body control, the latter at mind control. But to enter the spiritual life means to take a plunge into the Divine, as you would jump into the sea. And that is not the end but the very beginning; for after you have taken the plunge, you must learn to live in the Divine. How are you to do it? You have simply to jump straight in and not to think, "Where shall I fall? What will happen to me?" It is the hesitation of your mind that prevents you. You must simply let yourself go. If you wish to dive into the sea and are thinking all the time, "Ah, but there may be a stone here or a stone there", you cannot dive.

*But you see the sea and so you can jump straight into it.
But how are you to jump into the spiritual life?*

Of course, you must have had some glimpse of the Divine Reality, as you must see the sea and know something of it before you can jump into it. That glimpse is usually the awakening of the psychic consciousness. But some realisation you must have — a strong mental or vital, if not a deep psychic or integral contact. You must have felt strongly the Divine Presence in or about you; you must have felt the breath of the Divine world. And you must have felt too as a suffocating pressure the opposite breath of the ordinary world, drawing you to an endeavour to come out of that oppressive atmosphere. If you have that, then you have only to seek refuge unreservedly in the Divine Reality and live in its help and protection, in it alone. What you may

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have done in the course of your ordinary life only partially or in some parts of your being or at times and on occasions, you must do completely and for good. That is the plunge you have to take, and unless you do it, you may do Yoga for years and yet know nothing of a true spiritual living. Take the whole and entire plunge and you will be free from this outer confusion and get the true experience of the spiritual life.

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It has been said that in order to progress in Yoga one must offer up everything to the Divine, even every little thing that one has or does in life. What is precisely the meaning of that?

Yoga means union with the Divine, and the union is effected through offering—it is founded on the offering of yourself to the Divine. In the beginning you start by making this offering in a general way, as though once for all; you say, “I am the servant of the Divine; my life is given absolutely to the Divine; all my efforts are for the realisation of the Divine Life.” But that is only the first step; for this is not sufficient. When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that the whole of your life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it and carry it out in all the details of your existence. You must feel at every step that you belong to the Divine; you must have the constant experience that, in whatever you think or do, it is always the Divine Consciousness that is acting through you. You have no longer anything that you can call your own; you feel everything as coming from the Divine, and you have to offer it back to its source. When you can realise that, then even the smallest thing to which you do not usually pay much attention or care, ceases to be trivial and insignificant; it becomes full of meaning and it opens up a vast horizon beyond.

This is what you have to do to carry out your general offering in detailed offerings. Live constantly in the presence of the Divine; live in the feeling that it is this presence which moves you and is doing everything you do. Offer all your movements to it, not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions such as eating; when you

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eat, you must feel that it is the Divine who is eating through you. When you can thus gather all your movements into the One Life, then you have in you unity instead of division. No longer is one part of your nature given to the Divine, while the rest remains in its ordinary ways, engrossed in ordinary things; your entire life is taken up, an integral transformation is gradually realised in you.

In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, "When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it." To persist in this attitude means that you will remain untransformed and never have the true union; always you will be divided; you will have at best only glimpses of this greater life. For although certain experiences and realisations may come to you in meditation or in your inner consciousness, your body and your outer life will remain unchanged. An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life, is of no great use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world, they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with

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physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force.

An ideal of this kind may be good for those who want it, but it is not our Yoga. For we want the divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here. But if we want the Divine to reign here we must give all we have and are and do here to the Divine. It will not do to think that anything is unimportant or that the external life and its necessities are no part of the Divine Life. If we do, we shall remain where we have always been and there will be no conquest of the external world; nothing abiding there will have been done.

Do people who have advanced very far come back to this plane?

Yes; if there is a will in them to change this plane, then the more advanced they are, the surer they are to come back. And as for those who have the will of running away, even they, when they go over to the other side, may find that the flight was not of much use after all.

Do many remember that they have passed over and are back again?

When you reach a certain state of consciousness, you remember. It is not so difficult to touch this state partially for a short time; in deep meditation, in a dream or a vision one may have the feeling or the impression that he has lived this life before, had this realisation, known these truths. But this is not a full realisation; to come to that, one must have attained to a permanent consciousness within us which is everlasting and holds together all our existences in past or present or future time.

When we are concentrated in mental movements or

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intellectual pursuits, why do we sometimes forget or lose touch with the Divine?

You lose it because your consciousness is still divided. The Divine has not settled into your mind; you are not wholly consecrated to the Divine Life. Otherwise you could concentrate to any extent upon such things and still you would have the sense of being helped and supported by the Divine.

In all pursuits, intellectual or active, your one motto should be, "Remember and Offer." Let whatever you do be done as an offering to the Divine. And this too will be an excellent discipline for you; it will prevent you from doing many foolish and useless things.

Often in the beginning of the action this can be done; but as one gets engrossed in the work, one forgets. How is one to remember?

The condition to be aimed at, the real achievement of Yoga, the final perfection and attainment, for which all else is only a preparation, is a consciousness in which it is impossible to do anything without the Divine; for then, if you are without the Divine, the very source of your action disappears; knowledge, power, all are gone. But so long as you feel that the powers you use are your own, you will not miss the Divine support.

In the beginning of the Yoga you are apt to forget the Divine very often. But by constant aspiration you increase your remembrance and you diminish the forgetfulness. But this should not be done as a severe discipline or a duty; it must be a movement of love and joy. Then very soon a stage will come when, if you do not feel the presence of the Divine at every moment and whatever you are doing, you feel at once lonely and sad and miserable.

Whenever you find that you can do something without feeling the presence of the Divine and yet be perfectly comfortable,

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you must understand that you are not consecrated in that part of your being. That is the way of the ordinary humanity which does not feel any need of the Divine. But for a seeker of the Divine Life it is very different. And when you have entirely realised unity with the Divine, then, if the Divine were only for a second to withdraw from you, you would simply drop dead; for the Divine is now the Life of your life, your whole existence, your single and complete support. If the Divine is not there, nothing is left.

In the initial stages of Yoga, is it well for the Sadhak to read ordinary books?

You can read sacred books and yet be far away from the Divine; and you can read the most stupid productions and be in touch with the Divine. It is not possible to get an idea of what the transformed consciousness and its movements are until you have had a taste of the transformation. There is a way of consciousness in union with the Divine in which you can enjoy all you read, as you can all you observe, even the most indifferent books or the most uninteresting things. You can hear poor music, even music from which one would like to run away, and yet you can, not for its outward self but because of what is behind, enjoy it. You do not lose the distinction between good music and bad music, but you pass through either into that which it expresses. For there is nothing in the world which has not its ultimate truth and support in the Divine. And if you are not stopped by the appearance, physical or moral or aesthetic, but get behind and are in touch with the Spirit, the Divine Soul in things, you can reach beauty and delight even through what affects the ordinary sense only as something poor, painful or discordant.

Can it be said in justification of one's past that whatever has happened in one's life had to happen?

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Obviously, what has happened had to happen; it would not have been, if it had not been intended. Even the mistakes that we have committed and the adversities that fell upon us had to be, because there was some necessity in them, some utility for our lives. But in truth these things cannot be explained mentally and should not be. For all that happened was necessary, not for any mental reason, but to lead us to something beyond what the mind imagines. But is there any need to explain after all? The whole universe explains everything at every moment and a particular thing happens because the whole universe is what it is. But this does not mean that we are bound over to a blind acquiescence in Nature's inexorable law. You can accept the past as a settled fact and perceive the necessity in it, and still you can use the experience it gave you to build up the power consciously to guide and shape your present and your future.

Is the time also of an occurrence arranged in the Divine Plan of things?

All depends upon the plane from which one sees and speaks. There is a plane of divine consciousness in which all is known absolutely, and the whole plan of things foreseen and predetermined. That way of seeing lives in the highest reaches of the Supramental; it is the Supreme's own vision. But when we do not possess that consciousness, it is useless to speak in terms that hold good only in that region and are not our present effective way of seeing things. For at a lower level of consciousness nothing is realised or fixed beforehand; all is in the process of making. Here there are no settled facts, there is only the play of possibilities; out of the clash of possibilities is realised the thing that has to happen. On this plane we can choose and select; we can refuse one possibility and accept another; we can follow one path, turn away from another. And that we can do, even though what is actually happening may have been foreseen and predetermined in a higher plane.

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The Supreme Consciousness knows everything beforehand, because everything is realised there in her eternity. But for the sake of her play and in order to carry out actually on the physical plane what is foreordained in her own supreme self, she moves here upon earth as if she did not know the whole story; she works as if it was a new and untried thread that she was weaving. It is this apparent forgetfulness of her own foreknowledge in the higher consciousness that gives to the individual in the active life of the world his sense of freedom and independence and initiative. These things in him are her pragmatic tools or devices, and it is through this machinery that the movements and issues planned and foreseen elsewhere are realised here.

It may help you to understand if you take the example of an actor. An actor knows the whole part he has to play; he has in his mind the exact sequence of what is to happen on the stage. But when he is on the stage, he has to appear as if he did not know anything; he has to feel and act as if he were experiencing all these things for the first time, as if it was an entirely new world with all its chance events and surprises that was unrolling before his eyes.

Is there then no real freedom? Is everything absolutely determined, even your freedom, and is fatalism the highest secret?

Freedom and fatality, liberty and determinism are truths that obtain on different levels of consciousness. It is ignorance that makes the mind put the two on the same level and pit one against the other. Consciousness is not a single uniform reality, it is complex; it is not something like a flat plain, it is multidimensional. On the highest height is the Supreme and in the lowest depth is matter; and there is an infinite gradation of levels of consciousness between this lowest depth and the highest height.

In the plane of matter and on the level of the ordinary consciousness you are bound hand and foot. A slave to the

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mechanism of Nature, you are tied to the chain of Karma, and there, in that chain, whatever happens is rigorously the consequence of what has been done before. There is an illusion of independent movement, but in fact you repeat what all others do, you echo Nature's world-movements, you revolve helplessly on the crushing wheel of her cosmic machine.

But it need not be so. You can shift your place if you will; instead of being below, crushed in the machinery or moved like a puppet, you can rise and look from above and by changing your consciousness you can even get hold of some handle to move apparently inevitable circumstances and change fixed conditions. Once you draw yourself up out of the whirlpool and stand high above, you see you are free. Free from all compulsions, not only you are no longer a passive instrument, but you become an active agent. You are not only not bound by the consequences of your action, but you can even change the consequences. Once you see the play of forces, once you raise yourself to a plane of consciousness where lie the origins of forces and identify yourself with these dynamic sources, you belong no longer to what is moved but to that which moves.

This precisely is the aim of Yoga, — to get out of the cycle of Karma into a divine movement. By Yoga you leave the mechanical round of Nature in which you are an ignorant slave, a helpless and miserable tool, and rise into another plane where you become a conscious participant and a dynamic agent in the working out of a Higher Destiny. This movement of the consciousness follows a double line. First of all there is an ascension; you raise yourself out of the level of material consciousness into superior ranges. But this ascension of the lower into the higher calls a descent of the higher into the lower. When you rise above the earth, you bring down too upon earth something of the above, — some light, some power that transforms or tends to transform its old nature. And then these things that were distinct, disconnected and disparate from each other — the higher in you and the lower, the inner and the outer strata of your

being and consciousness — meet and are slowly joined together and gradually they fuse into one truth, one harmony.

It is in this way that what are called miracles happen. The world is made up of innumerable planes of consciousness and each has its own distinct laws; the laws of one plane do not hold good for another. A miracle is nothing but a sudden descent, a bursting forth of another consciousness and its powers — most often it is the powers of the vital — into this plane of matter. There is a precipitation, upon the material mechanism, of the mechanism of a higher plane. It is as though a lightning flash tore through the cloud of our ordinary consciousness and poured into it other forces, other movements and sequences. The result we call a miracle, because we see a sudden alteration, an abrupt interference with the natural laws of our own ordinary range, but the reason and order of it we do not know or see, because the source of the miracle lies in another plane. Such incursions of the worlds beyond into our world of matter are not very uncommon, they are even a constant phenomenon, and if we have eyes and know how to observe we can see miracles in abundance. Especially must they be constant among those who are endeavouring to bring down the higher reaches into the earth-consciousness below.

Has creation a definite aim? Is there something like a final end to which it is moving?

No, the universe is a movement that is eternally unrolling itself. There is nothing which you can fix upon as *the* end and one aim. But for the sake of action we have to section the movement, which is itself unending, and to say that this or that is the goal, for in action we need something upon which we can fix our aim. In a picture you need a definite scheme of composition and colour; you have to set a limit, to put the whole thing within a fixed framework; but the limit is illusory, the frame is a mere convention. There is a constant continuation of the picture that

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stretches beyond any particular frame, and each continuation can be drawn in the same conditions in an unending series of frames. Our aim is this or that, we say, but we know that it is only the beginning of another aim beyond it, and that in its turn leads to yet another; the series develop always and never stop.

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What is the proper function of the intellect? Is it a help or a hindrance to Sadhana?

Whether the intellect is a help or a hindrance depends upon the person and upon the way in which it is used. There is a true movement of the intellect and there is a wrong movement; one helps, the other hinders. The intellect that believes too much in its own importance and wants satisfaction for its own sake, is an obstacle to the higher realisation.

But this is true not in any special sense or for the intellect alone, but generally and of other faculties as well. For example, people do not regard an all-engrossing satisfaction of the vital desires or the animal appetites as a virtue; the moral sense is accepted as a mentor to tell one the bounds that one may not transgress. It is only in his intellectual activities that man thinks he can do without any such mentor or censor!

Any part of the being that keeps to its proper place and plays its appointed role is helpful; but directly it steps beyond its sphere, it becomes twisted and perverted and therefore false. A power has the right movement when it is set into activity for the divine's purpose; it has the wrong movement when it is set into activity for its own satisfaction.

The intellect, in its true nature, is an instrument of expression and action. It is something like an intermediary between the true knowledge, whose seat is in the higher regions above the mind, and realisation here below. The intellect or, generally speaking, the mind gives the form; the vital puts in the dynamism and life-power; the material comes in last and embodies.

How is one to meet adverse forces—forces that are invisible and yet quite living and tangible?

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A great deal depends upon the stage of development of your consciousness. At the beginning, if you have no special occult knowledge and power, the best you can do is to keep as quiet and peaceful as possible. If the attack takes the form of adverse suggestions try quietly to push them away, as you would some material object. The quieter you are, the stronger you become. The firm basis of all spiritual power is equanimity. You must not allow anything to disturb your poise: you can then resist every kind of attack. If, besides, you possess sufficient discernment and can see and catch the evil suggestions as they come to you, it becomes all the more easy for you to push them away; but sometimes they come unnoticed, and then it is more difficult to fight them. When that happens, you must sit quiet and call down peace and a deep inner quietness. Hold yourself firm and call with confidence and faith: if your aspiration is pure and steady, you are sure to receive help.

Attacks from adverse forces are inevitable: you have to take them as tests on your way and go courageously through the ordeal. The struggle may be hard, but when you come out of it, you have gained something, you have advanced a step. There is even a necessity for the existence of the hostile forces. They make your determination stronger, your aspiration clearer.

It is true, however, that they exist because you gave them reason to exist. So long as there is something in you which answers to them, their intervention is perfectly legitimate. If nothing in you responded, if they had no hold upon any part of your nature, they would retire and leave you. In any case, they need not stop or hamper your spiritual progress.

The only way to fail in your battle with the hostile forces is not to have a true confidence in the divine help. Sincerity in the aspiration always brings down the required succour. A quiet call, a conviction that in this ascension towards the realisation you are never walking all alone and a faith that whenever help is needed it is there, will lead you through, easily and securely.

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Do these hostile forces generally come from outside or inside?

If you think or feel that they come from inside, you have possibly opened yourself to them and they have settled in you unnoticed. The true nature of things is one of harmony; but there is a distortion in certain worlds that brings in perversion and hostility. If you have a strong affinity for these worlds of distortion, you can become friends with the beings that are there and answer fully to them. That happens, but it is not a very happy condition. The consciousness is at once blinded and you cannot distinguish the true from the false, you cannot even tell what is a lie and what is not.

In any case, when an attack comes the wisest attitude is to consider that it comes from outside and to say, "This is not myself and I will have nothing to do with it." You have to deal in the same way with all lower impulses and desires and all doubts and questionings in the mind. If you identify yourself with them, the difficulty in fighting them becomes all the greater; for then you have the feeling that you are facing the never easy task of overcoming your own nature. But once you are able to say, "No, this is not myself, I will have nothing to do with it", it becomes much easier to disperse them.

Where can the line be drawn between the inside and the outside?

The line is very flexible; it can be as near to you and as far from you as you will. You may take everything upon yourself and feel it as a part and parcel of your real self; or you may throw it away as you would a bit of hair or nail without being touched at all.

There have been religions whose followers would not part even with a bit of hair or nail, fearing that they would lose thereby something of their personality. Those who are capable

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of extending the consciousness as wide as the world, become the world; but those who are shut up in their little bodies and limited feelings stop at those limits; their bodies and their petty feelings are to them their whole self.

Can mere faith create all, conquer all?

Yes, but it must be an integral faith and it must be absolute. And it must be of the right kind, not merely a force of mental thought or will, but something more and deeper. The will put forth by the mind sets up opposite reactions and creates a resistance. You must have heard something of the method of Coué in healing diseases. He knew some secret of this power and utilised it with considerable effect; but he called it imagination and his method gave the faith he called up too mental a form. Mental faith is not sufficient; it must be completed and enforced by a vital and even a physical faith, a faith of the body. If you can create in yourself an integral force of this kind in all your being, then nothing can resist it; but you must reach down to the most subconscious, you must fix the faith in the very cells of the body. There is, for instance, now abroad the beginning of a knowledge among the scientists that death is not a necessity. But the whole of humanity believes firmly in death; it is, one might say, a general human suggestion based on a long unchanging experience. If this belief could be cast out first from the conscious mind, then from the vital nature and the subconscious physical layers, death would no longer be inevitable.

But it is not only in the mind of man that this idea of death exists. The animal creation knew it before him.

Death as a fact has been attached to all life upon earth; but man understands it in a different sense from the meaning Nature originally put into it. In man and in the animals that are nearest to his level, the necessity of death has taken a special form

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and significance to their consciousness; but the subconscious knowledge in this lower Nature which supports it is a feeling of the necessity of renewal and change and transformation.

It was the conditions of matter upon earth that made death indispensable. The whole sense of the evolution of matter has been a growth from a first state of unconsciousness to an increasing consciousness. And in this process of growth dissolution of forms became an inevitable necessity, as things actually took place. For a fixed form was needed in order that the organised individual consciousness might have a stable support. And yet it is the fixity of the form that made death inevitable. Matter had to assume forms; individualisation and the concrete embodiment of life-forces or consciousness-forces were impossible without it and without these there would have been lacking the first conditions of organised existence on the plane of matter. But a definite and concrete formation contracts the tendency to become at once rigid and hard and petrified. The individual form persisted as a too binding mould; it cannot follow the movements of the forces; it cannot change in harmony with the progressive change in the universal dynamism; it cannot meet continually Nature's demand or keep pace with her; it gets out of the current. At a certain point of this growing disparity and disharmony between the form and the force that presses upon it, a complete dissolution of the form is unavoidable. A new form must be created; a new harmony and parity made possible. This is the true significance of death and this is its use in Nature. But if the form can become more quick and pliant and the cells of the body can be awakened to change with the changing consciousness, there would be no need of a drastic dissolution, death would be no longer inevitable.

Someone has said that disasters and catastrophes in Nature, earthquake and deluge and the sinking of continents, are the consequence of a discordant and sinful humanity and with the progress and development of the

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human race a corresponding change will come about in physical Nature. How far is this true?

Perhaps the truth is rather that it is one and the same movement of consciousness that expresses itself in a Nature ridden with calamities and catastrophes and in a disharmonious humanity. The two things are not cause and effect, but stand on the same level. Above them there is a consciousness which is seeking for manifestation and embodiment upon earth, and in its descent towards matter it meets everywhere the same resistance, in man and in physical Nature. All the disorder and disharmony that we see upon earth is the result of this resistance. Calamity and catastrophe, conflict and violence, obscurity and ignorance — all ills come from the same source. Man is not the cause of external Nature, nor external Nature the cause of man, but both depend on the same one thing that is behind them and greater, and both are part of a perpetual and progressive movement of the material world to express it.

Now if there is awakened somewhere upon earth a receptivity and openness sufficient to bring down in its purity something of the Divine Consciousness, this descent and manifestation in matter can change not only the inner life, but the material conditions also, the physical expression in man and Nature. This descent does not depend for its possibility upon the condition of humanity as a whole. If we had to wait for the mass of humanity to reach a state of harmony, unity and aspiration, strong enough to bring down the Light and change the material conditions and the movement of Nature, there would be little hope. But there is a possibility that an individual or a small group or limited number may achieve the descent. It is not quantity or extension that matters. One drop of the Divine Consciousness entering into the consciousness of the earth could change everything here.

It is the mystery of the contact and fusion of the higher and the lower planes of consciousness that is the great secret, the hidden key. Always it has a transforming force; only here it

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would be on a larger scale and reach a higher degree. If there is someone on earth who is capable of coming consciously into contact with a plane that has not yet been manifested here and if by rising into it in his consciousness he can make that plane and the material meet and harmonise, then the great decisive movement of Nature's yet unrealised transformation can take place. A new power will descend and change the conditions of life upon earth.

Even as it is, every time that a great soul has come and revealed some light of truth or brought down upon earth a new force, the conditions on earth have changed, though not exactly in the way that had been hoped and expected. For example, one who has attained to a certain plane of knowledge and consciousness and spiritual experience, has come and said, "I am bringing to you liberation" or "I am bringing to you peace." Those who were around him believed, perhaps, that he was bringing it in a material way; when they found it was not as they thought, they could not understand what he had done. What he brought was a change in the consciousness, a peace of a kind unknown till then or a capacity for liberation that was not there before. But these movements belonged to the inner life and brought no tangible external change in the world. Perhaps the intention to change the world externally was not there; perhaps there was not the necessary knowledge; but still something was effected by these pioneers.

In spite of all adverse appearances, it may well be that earth has been preparing for a certain realisation by steps and stages. There has been a change in civilisation and a change in nature. If it is not apparent, it is because we see from an external point of view and because matter and its difficulties have never been seriously or thoroughly dealt with up till now. Still internally there has been a progress; in the inner consciousness there have been descents of the Light. But as to any realisation in matter, it is difficult to say anything, because we do not exactly know what might have happened there.

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There have been in the long past great and beautiful civilisations, perhaps as advanced materially as ours. Looked at from a certain standpoint the most modern might seem to be only a repetition of the most ancient cultures, and yet one cannot say that there has been no progress anywhere. An inner progress at least has been achieved and a greater readiness to respond to the higher consciousness has been born into the material parts. It has been necessary to do over and over again the same things, because what was attempted was never sufficiently done; but each time it has come nearer to being adequately done. When we practise an exercise over and over again we seem to be only repeating the same thing always, but still the accumulative result is some effective change.

The mistake is to look at these things through the dimensions of the human consciousness, for so seen these deep and vast movements seem inexplicable. It is dangerous to try to explain or understand them with the limited mental intelligence. That is the reason why philosophy has always failed to unveil the secret of things; it is because it has tried to fit the universe into the size of the human mind.

How many of us remember former lives?

In all, in some part of our consciousness, there is a remembrance. But this is a dangerous subject, because the human mind is too fond of romance. As soon as it comes to know something of this truth of rebirth, it wants to build up beautiful stories around it. Many people would tell you wonderful tales of how the world was built and how it will proceed in the future, how and where you were born in the past and what you will be hereafter, the lives you have lived and the lives you will still live. All this has nothing to do with spiritual life. The true remembrance of past births may indeed be part of an integral knowledge; but it cannot be got by that way of imaginative fancies. If it is on one side an objective knowledge, on the other it depends largely

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on personal and subjective experience, and here there is much chance of invention, distortion or false building. To reach the truth of these things, your experiencing consciousness must be pure and limpid, free from any mental interference or any vital interference, liberated from your personal notions and feelings and from your mind's habit of interpreting or explaining in its own way. An experience of past lives may be true, but between what you have seen and your mind's explanation or construction about it there is bound to be always a great gulf. It is only when you can rise above human feelings and get back from your mind, that you can reach the truth.

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*There are some human beings who are like vampires.
What are they and why are they like that?*

They are not human; there is only a human form or appearance. They are incarnations of beings from the world that is just next to the physical, beings who live on the plane which we call the vital world. It is a world of all the desires and impulses and passions and of movements of violence and greed and cunning and every kind of ignorance; but all the dynamisms too are there, all the life-energies and all the powers. The beings of this world have by their nature a strange grip over the material world and can exercise upon it a sinister influence. Some of them are formed out of the remains of the human being that persist after death in the vital atmosphere near to the earth-plane. His desires and hungers still float there and remain in form even after the dissolution of the body; often they are moved to go on manifesting and satisfying themselves and the birth of these creatures of the vital world is the consequence. But these are minor beings and, if they can be very troublesome, it is yet not impossible to deal with them. There are others, far more dangerous, who have never been in human form; never were they born into a human body upon earth, for most often they refuse to accept this way of birth because it is slavery to matter and they prefer to remain in their own world, powerful and mischievous, and to control earthly beings from there. For, if they do not want to be born on earth, they do want to be in contact with the physical nature, but without being bound by it. Their method is to try first to cast their influence upon a man; then they enter slowly into his atmosphere and in the end may get complete possession of him, driving out entirely the real human soul and personality. These creatures, when in possession of an

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earthly body, may have the human appearance but they have not a human nature. Their habit is to draw upon the life-force of human beings; they attack and capture vital power wherever they can and feed upon it. If they come into your atmosphere, you suddenly feel depressed and exhausted; if you are near them for some time you fall sick; if you live with one of them, it may kill you.

But how is one to get such creatures out of one's environment when they are once there?

The vital power incarnated in these beings is of a very material kind and it is effective only within a short distance. Ordinarily, if you do not live in the same house or if you are not in the same company with them, you do not come within their influence. But if you open some channel of connection or communication, through letters, for example, then you make possible an interchange of forces and are liable to be influenced by them even from a far distance. The wisest way with these beings is to cut off all connection and have nothing to do with them — unless indeed you have great occult knowledge and power and have learned how to cover and protect yourself — but even then it is always a dangerous thing to move about with them. To hope to transform them, as some people do, is a vain illusion; for they do not want to be transformed. They have no intention of allowing any transformation and all effort in that direction is useless.

These beings, when in the human body, are not often conscious of what they really are. Sometimes they have a vague feeling that they are not quite human in the ordinary way. But still there are cases where they are conscious and very conscious; not only do they know that they do not belong to humanity but they know what they are, act in that knowledge and deliberately pursue their ends. The beings of the vital world are powerful by their very nature; when to their power they add knowledge, they become doubly dangerous. There is nothing to be done

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with these creatures; you should avoid having any dealings with them unless you have the power to crush and destroy them. If you are forced into contact with them, beware of the spell they can cast. These vital beings, when they manifest on the physical plane, have always a great hypnotic power; for the centre of their consciousness is in the vital world and not in the material and they are not veiled and dwarfed by the material consciousness as human beings are.

Is it not a fact that these creatures are drawn by some peculiar fascination towards the spiritual life?

Yes, because they feel they do not belong to this earth but come from somewhere else; and they feel too that they have powers they have half lost and they are eager to win them back. So whenever they meet anyone who can give them some knowledge of the invisible world, they rush to him. But they mistake the vital for the spiritual world and in their seeking follow vital and not spiritual ends. Or perhaps they deliberately seek to corrupt spirituality and build up an imitation of it in the mould of their own nature. Even then it is a kind of homage they pay, or a sort of amends they make, in their own way, to the spiritual life. And there is too some kind of attraction that compels them; they have revolted against the Divine rule, but in spite of their revolt or perhaps because of it, they feel somehow bound and are powerfully attracted by its presence.

This is how it happens that you see them sometimes used as instruments to bring into connection with each other those who are to realise the spiritual life upon earth. They do not purposely serve this use, but are compelled to it. It is a kind of compensation that they pay. For they feel the pressure of the descending Light, they sense that the time has come or is soon coming when they must choose between conversion or dissolution, choose either to surrender to the Divine Will and take their part in the Great Plan or to sink into unconsciousness and cease

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to be. The contact with a seeker of Truth gives such a being his chance to change. All depends upon how he utilises his chance. Taken rightly, it may open his way to liberation from falsehood and obscurity and misery, which is the stuff out of which these vital creatures are made, and bring him to Regeneration and to Life.

Have not these beings a great control over money power?

Yes. The power of money is at present under the influence or in the hands of the forces and beings of the vital world. It is because of this influence that you never see money going in any considerable amount to the cause of Truth. Always it goes astray, because it is in the clutch of the hostile forces and is one of the principal means by which they keep their grip upon the earth. The hold of the hostile forces upon money-power is powerfully, completely and thoroughly organised and to extract anything out of this compact organisation is a most difficult task. Each time that you try to draw a little of this money away from its present custodians, you have to undertake a fierce battle.

And yet one signal victory somewhere over the adverse forces that have the hold upon money would make victory possible simultaneously and automatically at all other points also. If in one place they yielded, all who now feel that they cannot give money to the cause of Truth would suddenly experience a great and intense desire to give. It is not that those rich men who are more or less toys and instruments in the hands of the vital forces are averse to spend; their avarice is awake only when the vital desires and impulses are not touched. For when it is to gratify some desire that they call their own, they spend readily; but when they are called to share their ease and the benefits of their wealth with others, then they find it hard to part with their money. The vital power controlling money is like a guardian who keeps his wealth in a big safe always tightly closed. Each time the people who are in its grasp are asked to part with their

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money, they put all sorts of careful questions before they will consent to open their purses even a very little way; but if a vital impulse arises in them with its demand, the guardian is happy to open wide the coffer and money flows out freely. Commonly, the vital desires he obeys are connected with the sex impulses, but very often too he yields to the desire for fame and consideration, the desire for food or any other desire that is on the same vital level; whatever does not belong to this category is closely questioned and scrutinised, grudgingly admitted and most often refused help in the end. In those who are slaves of vital beings, the desire for truth and light and spiritual achievement, even if it at all touches them, cannot balance the desire for money. To win money from their hands for the Divine means to fight the devil out of them; you have first to conquer or convert the vital being whom they serve, and it is not an easy task. Men who are under the sway of vital creatures can change from a life of ease, cast away enjoyment and become intensely ascetic and yet remain just as wicked as ever and even by the change turn worse than before.

Why is one person allowed to exercise his will over another?

It is not that one is allowed to exercise his will over another, but that there is a universal will and those who are more or less capable of manifesting this force seem to have a stronger will-power. It is like vital force or light or electricity or any other power of nature; some are good channels or instruments for manifesting the power, others are poor channels. There is no question of morality here. It is a fact of nature, a law of the great play.

Can one meet the beings of the vital in their own domain?

Vital beings move in a supraphysical world where human beings,

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if they chance to enter, feel at sea, helpless and defenceless. The human being is at home and safe in the material body; the body is his protection. There are some who are full of contempt for their bodies and think that things will be much better and easier after death without them. But in fact the body is your fortress and your shelter. While you are lodged in it the forces of the hostile world find a difficulty in getting any direct hold upon you. What are nightmares? These are your sorties into the vital world. And what is the first thing you try to do when you are in the grip of a nightmare? You rush back into your body and shake yourself into your normal physical consciousness. But in the world of the vital forces you are a stranger; it is an uncharted sea in which you have neither compass nor rudder. You do not know how to go, you do not know where to go and at each step you do just the opposite of what should be done. Directly you enter any realm of this world, its beings gather round you and want to encompass and get out of you all you have, to draw what they can and make it a food and a prey. If you have no strong light and force radiating from within you, you move there without your body as if you had no coat to protect you against a chill and bleak atmosphere, no house to shield you, even no skin covering you, your nerves exposed and bare. There are men who say, "How unhappy I am in this body", and think of death as an escape! But after death you have the same vital surroundings and are in danger from the same forces that are the cause of your misery in this life. The dissolution of the body forces you out into the open spaces of the vital world. And you have no longer a defence; there is not the physical body any longer to rush back to for safety.

It is here upon earth, in the body itself, that you must acquire a complete knowledge and learn to use a full and complete power. Only when you have done that will you be free to move about with entire security in all the worlds. Only when you are incapable of having the slightest fear, when you remain unmoved, for example, in the midst of the worst nightmare,

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can you say, "Now I am ready to go into the vital world." But this means the acquisition of a power and a knowledge that can come only when you are a perfect master of the impulses and desires of the vital nature. You must be absolutely free from everything that can bring in the beings of the darkness or allow them to rule over you; if you are not free, beware!

No attachments, no desires, no impulses, no preferences; perfect equanimity, unchanging peace and absolute faith in the Divine protection: with that you are safe, without it you are in peril. And as long as you are not safe, it is better to do like little chickens that take shelter under the mother's wings.

How does the physical body act as a protection?

The physical body acts as a protection by its grossness, by the very thing we charge against it. It is dull and insensitive, thick, rigid and hard; it is like a fortress with strong dense walls. The vital world is fluidic, there things move and mix and interpenetrate freely; it is like the waves of the sea that ceaselessly flow into each other and change and mingle. Against this fluidity of the vital world you are defenceless unless you can oppose to it a very powerful light and force from inside; otherwise it penetrates you and there is nothing to hamper its invading influence. But the body intervenes, cuts you off from the vital world and is a dam against the flood of its forces.

But is there any individuality in the forms of the vital world, if it is so fluid?

Individuality there is; only its forms are not so fixed and hard as the forms of embodied beings. Individuality does not mean an unplastic rigidity. A stone has a very rigid form, perhaps the most rigid we know, but there is very little individuality in it. Take ten or twenty stones together and you will have to be very careful if you want to discern between them. But the beings of

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the vital world can be recognised at the very first sight one from another; you distinguish them by something in the way in which the form is built, by the atmosphere which it carries with it, by the manner in which each moves and speaks and acts. As human beings change their expression according as they are happy or angry; these beings also undergo change in the stress of their moods, but the alteration is more intense in the vital world. Not only the mere expression but the very forms of the features change.

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*What is the nature of the power that thought possesses?
How and to what extent am I the creator of my world?*

According to the Buddhist teachings, every human being lives and moves in a world of his own, quite independent of the world in which another lives; it is only when a certain harmony is created between these different worlds that they interpenetrate and men can meet and understand one another. This is true of the mind; for everybody moves in a mental world of his own, created by his own thoughts. And it is so true that always, when something has been said, each understands it in a different way; for what he catches is not the thing that has been spoken but something he has in his own head. But it is a truth that belongs to the movement of the mental plane and holds good only there.

For the mind is an instrument of action and formation and not an instrument of knowledge; at each moment it is creating forms. Thoughts are forms and have an individual life, independent of their author: sent out from him into the world, they move in it towards the realisation of their own purpose of existence. When you think of anyone, your thought takes a form and goes out to find him; and, if your thinking is associated with some will that is behind it, the thought-form that has gone out from you makes an attempt to realise itself. Let us say, for instance, that you have a keen desire for a certain person to come and that, along with this vital impulse of desire, a strong imagination accompanies the mental form you have made; you imagine, "If he came, it would be like this or it would be like that." After a time you drop the idea altogether, and you do not know that even after you have forgotten it, your thought continues to exist. For it does still exist and is in action, independent of you, and it would need a great power to bring it back from its work. It is working

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in the atmosphere of the person touched by it and creates in him the desire to come. And if there is a sufficient power of will in your thought-form, if it is a well-built formation, it will arrive at its own realisation. But between the formation and the realisation there is a certain lapse of time, and if in this interval your mind has been occupied with quite other things, then when there happens this fulfilment of your forgotten thought, you may not even remember that you once harboured it; you do not know that you were the instigator of its action and the cause of what has come about. And it happens very often too that when the result does come, you have ceased to desire or care for it. There are some men who have a very strong formative power of this kind and always they see their formations realised; but because they have not a well-disciplined mental and vital being, they want now one thing and now another and these different or opposite formations and their results collide and clash with one another. And these people wonder how it is that they are living in so great a confusion and disharmony! They do not realise that it is their own thoughts and desires that have built the circumstances around them which seem to them so incoherent and contradictory and make their life almost unbearable.

This is a knowledge of great importance, if it is given along with the secret of its right use. Self-discipline and self-mastery are the secret; the secret is to find in oneself the source of the Truth and that constant government of the Divine Will which can alone give to each formation its full power and its integral and harmonious realisation. Men generally form thoughts without knowing how these formations move and act. Formed in this state of confusion and ignorance, they clash with one another and create an impression of strain and effort and fatigue and the feeling that you are cutting your way through a multitude of obstacles. These conditions of ignorance and incoherence set in motion a confused conflict in which the strongest and the most enduring forms will have victory over the others.

There is one thing certain about the mind and its workings;

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it is that you can understand only what you already know in your own inner self. What strikes you in a book is what you have already experienced deep within you. Men find a book or a teaching very wonderful and often you hear them say, "That is exactly what I myself feel and know, but I could not bring it out or express it as well as it is expressed here." When men come across a book of true knowledge, each finds himself there, and at every new reading he discovers things that he did not see in it at first; it opens to him each time a new field of knowledge that had till then escaped him in it. But that is because it reaches layers of knowledge that were waiting for expression in the subconscious in him; the expression has now been given by somebody else and much better than he could himself have done it. But, once expressed, he immediately recognises it and feels that it is the truth. The knowledge that seems to come to you from outside is only an occasion for bringing out the knowledge that is within you.

The experience of misrepresentation of something we have said is a very common one and it has a similar source. We say something that is quite clear, but the way in which it is understood is stupefying! Each sees in it something else than what was intended or even puts into it something that is quite the contrary of its sense. If you want to understand truly and avoid this kind of error, you must go behind the sound and movement of the words and learn to listen in silence. If you listen in silence, you will hear rightly and understand rightly; but so long as there is something moving about and making a noise in your head, you will understand only what is moving in your head and not what is told you.

Why is one pursued by a host of adverse conditions, when one first becomes acquainted with Yoga? Someone has said that when you open the door to Yoga, you are confronted by a multitude of obstacles. Is this true?

It is not an absolute rule; and much depends upon the person.

Adverse conditions come to many as a test for the weak points in their nature. The indispensable basis for Yoga, which must be well established before you can walk freely on the path, is equanimity. Naturally, from that point of view, all disturbances are tests which you have to pass. But they are necessary too in order to break down the limits which your mental constructions have built around you and which prevent your opening to the Light and the Truth. The whole mental world in which you live is limited, even though you may not know or feel its limitations, and something must come and break down this building in which your mind has shut itself and liberate it. For instance, you have some fixed rules, ideas or principles to which you attribute an absolute importance; most often it is an adherence to certain moral principles or precepts, such as the commandment "Honour thy father and mother" or "Thou shalt not kill" and the rest. Each man has some fad or one preferred shibboleth or another, each thinks that he is free from this or that prejudice from which others suffer and is willing to regard such notions as quite false; but he imagines that his is not like theirs, it is for him the truth, the real truth. An attachment to a rule of the mind is an indication of a blindness still hiding somewhere. Take, for example, the very universal superstition, prevalent all over the world, that asceticism and spirituality are one and the same thing. If you describe someone as a spiritual man or a spiritual woman, people at once think of one who does not eat or sits all day without moving, one who lives in a hut in great poverty, one who has given away all he had and keeps nothing for himself. This is the picture that immediately arises in the minds of ninety-nine people out of a hundred, when you speak of a spiritual man; the one proof of spirituality for them is poverty and abstinence from everything that is pleasant or comfortable. This is a mental construction which must be thrown down if you are to be free to see and follow the spiritual truth. For you come to the spiritual life with a sincere aspiration and you want to meet the Divine and realise the Divine in your consciousness and in your life; and

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then what happens is that you arrive in a place which is not at all a hut and meet a Divine One who is living a comfortable life, eating freely, surrounded by beautiful or luxurious things, not distributing what he has to the poor, but accepting and enjoying all that people give him. At once with your fixed mental rule you are bewildered and cry, "Why, what is this? I thought I was to meet a spiritual man!" This false conception has to be broken down and disappear. Once it is gone, you find something that is much higher than your narrow ascetic rule, a complete openness that leaves the being free. If you are to get something, you accept it, and if you are to give up the very same thing, you with an equal willingness leave it. Things come and you take them up; things go and you let them pass, with the same smile of equanimity in the taking or the leaving.

Or, again, you have adopted as your golden rule, "Thou shalt not kill", and have a horror for cruelty and slaughter. Do not be surprised if you are immediately put in the presence of killing, not only once but repeatedly, until you understand that your ideal is no more than a mental principle and that a seeker of the spiritual truth should not be bound and attached to a mental rule. And when once you are free from it, you will find perhaps that all these scenes which troubled you — and were indeed sent in order to trouble you and shake you out of your mental building — have, singularly enough, ceased altogether to happen in your presence.

When you come to the Divine, you must abandon all mental conceptions; but, instead of doing that, you throw your conceptions upon the Divine and want the Divine to obey them. The only true attitude for a Yogi is to be plastic and ready to obey the Divine Command whatever it may be; nothing must be indispensable to him, nothing a burden. Often the first impulse of those who want to live the spiritual life is to throw away all they have; but they do it because they want to be rid of a burden, not because they want to surrender to the Divine. Men who possess wealth and are surrounded by the things that give

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them luxury and enjoyment turn to the Divine, and immediately their movement is to run away from these things, — or, as they say, “to escape from their bondage”. But it is a wrong movement; you must not think that the things you have belong to you, — they belong to the Divine. If the Divine wants you to enjoy anything, enjoy it; but be ready too to give it up the very next moment with a smile.

What are physical ailments? Are they attacks by the hostile forces from outside?

There are two factors that have to be considered in the matter. There is what comes from outside and there is what comes from your inner condition. Your inner condition becomes a cause of illness when there is a resistance or revolt in it or when there is some part in you that does not respond to the protection; or even there may be something there that almost willingly and wilfully calls in the adverse forces. It is enough if there is a slight movement of this kind in you; the hostile forces are at once upon you and their attack takes often the form of illness.

But are not illnesses sometimes the result of microbes and not a part of the movement of the Yoga?

Where does Yoga begin and where does it end? Is not the whole of your life Yoga? The possibilities of illness are always there in your body and around you; you carry within you or there swarm about you the microbes and germs of every disease. How is it that all of a sudden you succumb to an illness which you did not have for years? You will say it is due to a “depression of the vital force”. But from where does the depression come? It comes from some disharmony in the being, from a lack of receptivity to the divine forces. When you cut yourself off from the energy and light that sustain you, then there is this depression, there is created what medical science calls a “favourable ground” and

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something takes advantage of it. It is doubt, gloominess, lack of confidence, a selfish turning back upon yourself that cuts you off from the light and divine energy and gives the attack this advantage. It is this that is the cause of your falling ill and not microbes.

But has it not been found that by improved sanitation the health of the average citizen improves?

Medicine and sanitation are indispensable in the ordinary life, but I am not speaking now of the average citizen, I am speaking of those who do Yoga. Still there is this disadvantage of sanitation that while you diminish the chances of catching an illness, you diminish also your natural power of resistance. Attendants in hospitals, who are always washing with disinfectants, find that their hands become more easily infected and are much more susceptible than the hands of others. There are people, on the contrary, who know nothing of hygiene and do the most insanitary things and yet remain immune. Their very ignorance helps them because it shuts them to the suggestions that come with medical knowledge. On the other hand, your belief in the sanitary precautions you take helps them to work. For your thought is, "Now I am disinfected and safe", and to that extent it makes you safe.

But why then are we to take sanitary precautions such as drinking only filtered water?

Is any one of you pure and strong enough not to be affected by suggestions? If you drink unfiltered water and think, "Now I am drinking impure water", you have every chance of falling sick. And even though such suggestions may not enter through the conscious mind, the whole of your subconscious is there, almost helplessly open to take any kind of suggestion. In life it is the action of the subconscious that has the larger share and it acts

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a hundred times more powerfully than the conscious parts. The normal human condition is a state filled with apprehensions and fears; if you observe your mind deeply for ten minutes, you will find that for nine out of ten it is full of fears — it carries in it fear about many things, big and small, near and far, seen and unseen, and though you do not usually take conscious notice of it, it is there all the same. To be free from all fear can come only by steady effort and discipline.

And even if by discipline and effort you have liberated your mind and your vital of apprehension and fear, it is more difficult to convince the body. But that too must be done. Once you enter the path of Yoga you must get rid of all fears — the fears of your mind, the fears of your vital, the fears of your body which are lodged in its very cells. One of the uses of the blows and knocks you receive on the path of Yoga is to rid you of all fear. The causes of your fears leap on you again and again, until you can stand before them free and indifferent, untouched and pure. One has a fear of the sea, another the fear of fire. The latter will find, it may be, that he has to face conflagration after conflagration till he is so trained that not a cell of his body quivers. That of which you have horror comes repeatedly till the horror is gone. One who seeks the transformation and is a follower of the Path, must become through and through fearless, not to be touched or shaken by anything whatever in any part of his nature.

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If our will is only an expression or echo of the universal will, where is the place of individual initiative? Is the individual only an instrument to register universal movements? Has he no power of creation or origination?

All depends upon the plane of consciousness from which you are looking at things and speaking of them or on the part of the being from which you act.

If you look from one plane of consciousness, the individual will appear to you as if he were not only an instrument and recorder, but a creator. But look from another and higher plane of consciousness with a wider view of things and you will see that this is only an appearance. In the workings of the universe whatever happens is the result of all that has happened before. How do you propose to separate one being from the integral play of the manifestation or one movement from the whole mass of movements? Where are you going to put the origin of a thing or its beginning? The whole play is a rigidly connected chain; one link merges imperceptibly into another. Nothing can be taken out of the chain and explained by itself as if it were its own source and beginning.

And what do you mean when you say that the individual creates or originates a movement? Does he do it all out of himself or out of nothing as it were? If a being were able to create in that way a thought or feeling or action or anything else, he would be the creator of the world. It is only if the individual goes back in his consciousness into the greater Consciousness which is the origin of things, that he can be an originator; he can initiate a movement only by identifying himself with the conscious Power which is the ultimate source of all movements.

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There are many planes of consciousness; and the determinism of one plane is not the same as the determinism of another. So, when you speak of the creative individual, of what part of him are you thinking? For he is a very composite entity. Is it his psychic being of which you speak, or the mental or the vital or the physical? Between the unseen source of a movement and its manifestation, its external expression through the individual, there are all these steps and many others; and on each many modifications of it take place, many distortions and deformations. It is these changes that give the illusion of a new creation, a new origin, or a new starting-point for a movement. It is like when you put a stick into water; you see the stick, not in its true line, but bent into an angle. But it is an illusion, a distortion by the sight; it is not even a real angle.

Each individual consciousness, you can say, brings into the universal movement something that you can call from a certain point of view its own deformation or from another its own quality of the movement. These individual motions are part of the play of the Divine movement; they are not themselves origins, they are a transformation of things whose origin you must seek in the universe as a whole.

The sense of separation is spread everywhere, but it is an illusion; it is one of those false moods of which we must be cured if we want to enter into the true consciousness. The mind cuts the world into small bits: it says, here this stops, there that begins, and by this fragmentation it succeeds in distorting the universal movement. There is one great flow of a single, all-embracing, all-containing consciousness which manifests in an ever unrolling universe. This is the truth that stands behind everything here; but there is too this illusion which masks the truth from you, the illusion of these many movements which imagine that they are separate from one another, that they stand by themselves, in themselves and for themselves and that each is a thing in itself apart from the rest of the universe. They have the impression that their action and reaction upon one another is

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something external, as if they were like different worlds standing in each other's presence but with no point of contact except some external relations at a distance. Each sees himself as if he were a separate personality existing in its own right. This error of the separative sense has been allowed as part of the universal play, because it was necessary that the one consciousness should objectify itself and fix its forms. But because it has been allowed in the past, it does not follow that the illusion of separateness must always continue.

In the universal play there are some, the majority, who are ignorant instruments; they are actors who are moved about like puppets, knowing nothing. There are others who are conscious, and these act their part, knowing that it is a play. And there are some who have the full knowledge of the universal movement and are identified with it and with the one Divine Consciousness and yet consent to act as though they were something separate, a division of the whole. There are many intermediary stages between that ignorance and this full knowledge, many ways of participating in the play. There is a state of ignorance in which you do a thing and believe that it was you who decided it; there is a state of lesser ignorance in which you do it knowing that you are made to do it but you do not know how or why; and there is too a state of consciousness in which you are fully aware, —for you know what it is that acts through you, you know that you are an instrument, you know how and why your act is done, its process and its purpose. The state of ignorance in which you believe that you are the doer of your acts persists so long as it is necessary for your development; but as soon as you are capable of passing into a higher condition, you begin to see that you are an instrument of the one consciousness; you take a step upward and you rise to a higher conscious level.

Do hostile forces attack one on the mental plane as they do in the vital world?

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It is difficult to give a precise answer without going into a number of explanations into which we cannot now enter.

Mind is one movement, but there are many varieties of the movement, many strata, that touch and even press into each other. At the same time the movement we call mind penetrates into other planes. In the mental world itself there are many levels. All these mind-planes and mind-forces are interdependent; but yet there is a difference in the quality of their movements and for facility of expression we have to separate them from one another. Thus we can speak of a higher mind, an intermediary mind, a physical and even a quite material mind; and there are many other distinctions that can be made.

Now, there are mental planes that stand high above the vital world and escape its influence; there are no hostile forces or beings there. But there are others — and they are many — that can be touched or penetrated by the vital forces. The mind-plane that belongs to the physical world, the physical mind, as we usually call it, is more material in its structure and movement than the true mind and it is very much under the sway of the vital world and the hostile forces. This physical mind is usually in a kind of alliance with the lower vital consciousness and its movements; when the lower vital manifests certain desires and impulses, this more material mind comes to its aid and justifies and supports them with specious explanations and reasonings and excuses. It is this layer of mind that is most open to suggestions from the vital world and most often invaded by its forces. But there is in us a higher mind which moves in the region of disinterested ideas and luminous speculations and is the originator of forms, and there is a mind of pure ideas that have not yet been put into form; these greater mind-levels are free from the vital movements and the adverse forces, because they stand far above them. There may be contradictory movements there; there may be movements and formations that come into clash with the Truth or are in conflict with one another; but there is no vital disturbance, nothing that can be called hostile. The

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true philosopher mind, the mind that is the thinker, discoverer, maker of forms, and the mind of pure ideas that are not yet put into form, are beyond this inferior invasion and influence. But this does not mean that their motions cannot be imitated or their creations misused by perverse or hostile beings of a greater make and higher origin than those of whom I have till now spoken.

What are the conditions in the psychic world? How is it situated with regard to the hostile forces?

The psychic world or plane of consciousness is that part of the world, the psychic being is that part of the being which is directly under the influence of the Divine Consciousness; the hostile forces cannot have even the remotest action upon it. It is a world of harmony, and everything moves in it from light to light and from progress to progress. It is the seat of the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Self in the individual being. It is a centre of light and truth and knowledge and beauty and harmony which the Divine Self in each of you creates by his presence, little by little; it is influenced, formed and moved by the Divine Consciousness of which it is a part and parcel. It is in each of you the deep inner being which you have to find in order that you may come in contact with the Divine in you. It is the intermediary between the Divine Consciousness and your external consciousness; it is the builder of the inner life, it is that which manifests in the outer nature the order and rule of the Divine Will. If you become aware in your outer consciousness of the psychic being within you and unite with it, you can find the pure Eternal Consciousness and live in it; instead of being moved by the Ignorance as the human being constantly is, you grow aware of the presence of an eternal light and knowledge within you, and to it you surrender and are integrally consecrated to it and moved by it in all things.

For your psychic being is that part of you which is already given to the Divine. It is its influence gradually spreading from

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within towards the most outward and material boundaries of your consciousness that will bring about the transformation of your entire nature. There can be no obscurity here; it is the luminous part in you. Most people are unconscious of this psychic part within them; the effort of Yoga is to make you conscious of it, so that the process of your transformation, instead of a slow labour extending through centuries, can be pressed into one life or even a few years.

The psychic being is that which persists after death, because it is your eternal self; it is this that carries the consciousness forward from life to life.

The psychic being is the real individuality of the true and divine individual within you. For your individuality means your special mode of expression and your psychic being is a special aspect of the one Divine Consciousness that has taken shape in you. But in the psychic consciousness there is not that sense of division between the individual and the universal consciousness which affects the other parts of your nature. You are conscious there that your individuality is your own line of expression, but at the same time you know too that it is an expression objectifying the one universal consciousness. It is as though you had taken a portion out of yourself and put it in front of you and there were a mutual look and play of movement between the two. This duality was necessary in order to create and establish the objectivised relation and to enjoy it; but in your psychic being the separation that sharpens the duality is seen to be an illusion, an appearance and nothing more.

Is there a difference between the “spiritual” and the “psychic”? Are they different planes?

Yes, the psychic plane belongs to the personal manifestation; the psychic is that which is divine in you put out to be dynamic in the play. But when we speak of the spiritual we are thinking of something that is concentrated in the Divine rather than in the

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external manifestation. The spiritual plane is something static behind and above the outward play; it supports the instruments of the nature, but is not itself included or involved in the external manifestation here.

But in speaking of these things one must be careful not to be imprisoned by the words we use. When I speak of the psychic or the spiritual, I mean things that are very deep and real behind the flat surface of the words and intimately connected even in their difference. Intellectual definitions and distinctions are too external and rigid to seize the true truth of things. And yet, unless you are very much in the habit of speaking to one another, there is almost a necessity of defining the sense of your words, if you are to understand each other. The ideal condition for a conversation is when the minds are so well attuned that the words are only a support for a spontaneous mutual understanding and you need not explain at each step what you utter. This is the advantage when you talk always with the same persons; an attuned harmony is established between their minds and the significance of the things spoken penetrates them at once.

There is a world of ideas without form and it is there that you must enter if you want to seize what is behind the words. So long as you have to draw your understanding from the forms of words, you are likely to fall into much confusion about the true sense; but if in a silence of your mind you can rise into the world from which ideas descend to take form, at once the real understanding comes. If you are to be sure of understanding one another, you must be able to understand in silence. There is a condition in which your minds are so well attuned and harmonised together that one perceives the thought of the other without any necessity of words. But if there is not this attunement, there will always be some deformation of your meaning, because to what you speak the other mind supplies its own significance. I use a word in a certain sense or shade of its sense; you are accustomed to put into it another sense or shade. Then, evidently, you will understand, not my exact

meaning in it, but what the word means to you. This is true not of speech only, but of reading also. If you want to understand a book with a deep teaching in it, you must be able to read it in the mind's silence; you must wait and let the expression go deep inside you into the region where words are no more and from there come slowly back to your exterior consciousness and its surface understanding. But if you let the words jump at your external mind and try to adapt and adjust the two, you will have entirely missed their real sense and power. There can be no perfect understanding unless you are in union with the unexpressed mind that is behind the centre of expression.

We spoke once of individual minds as worlds that are distinct and separate from one another; each is shut up in itself and has almost no direct point of contact with any other. But that is in the region of the inferior mind; there your own formations close you in; you cannot get out of them or out of yourself; you can understand only yourself and your own reflection in things. But here in this higher region of the unexpressed mind and its purer altitudes you are free; when you enter there, you go out of yourself and penetrate into a universal mental plane in which each individual mental world is dipping as if into a huge sea. There you can understand entirely what is going on in another and read his mind as if it were your own, because there no separation divides mind from mind. It is only when you unite in that region with others that you can understand them; otherwise you are not attuned, you do not touch, you have no means of knowing precisely what is happening in another mind than yours. Most often when you are in the presence of another you are quite ignorant of what he thinks or feels; but if you are able to go beyond and above this external plane of expression, if you can enter into a plane where a silent communion is possible, then you can read in that other as you would in yourself. Then the words you use for your expression are of very little importance, because the full comprehension lies beyond them in something else and a minimum of words is sufficient for your

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purpose. Long explanations are not necessary there; you do not need that a thought should be brought out into full expression, for the direct vision of what is meant is with you.

Will a time come when the hostile forces will be there no longer?

When their presence in the world is no more of any use, they will disappear. Their action is used as a testing process, so that nothing may be forgotten, nothing left out in the work of transformation. They will allow no mistake. If you have overlooked in your own being even a single detail, they will come and put their touch upon that neglected spot and make it so painfully evident that you will be forced to change. When they will no longer be required for this process, their existence will become useless and they will vanish. They are suffered to exist here, because they are necessary in the Great Work; once they are no more indispensable, they will either change or go.

Will it be a long time before that happens?

All depends upon your point of view. For time is relative; you can speak of it from the ordinary external human standpoint or from the deeper viewpoint of an inner consciousness or from the outlook of the Divine.

Whether the thing to be done takes a thousand years or only a year according to the human computation, does not matter at all, if you are one with the Divine Consciousness; for then you leave outside you the things of the human nature and you enter into the infinity and eternity of the Divine Nature. Then you escape from this feeling of a great eagerness of hurry with which men are obsessed, because they want to see things done. Agitation, haste, restlessness lead nowhere. It is foam on the sea; it is a great fuss that stops with itself. Men have a feeling that if they are not all the time running about and bursting into fits of

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feverish activity, they are doing nothing. It is an illusion to think that all these so-called movements change things. It is merely taking a cup and beating the water in it; the water is moved about, but it is not changed for all your beating. This illusion of action is one of the greatest illusions of human nature. It hurts progress because it brings on you the necessity of rushing always into some excited movement. If you could only perceive the illusion and see how useless it all is, how it changes nothing! Nowhere can you achieve anything by it. Those who are thus rushing about are the tools of forces that make them dance for their own amusement. And they are not forces of the best quality either.

Whatever has been done in the world has been done by the very few who can stand outside the action in silence; for it is they who are the instruments of the Divine Power. They are dynamic agents, conscious instruments; they bring down the forces that change the world. Things can be done in that way, not by a restless activity. In peace, in silence and in quietness the world was built; and each time that something is to be truly built, it is in peace and silence and quietness that it must be done. It is ignorance to believe that you must run from morning to night and labour at all sorts of futile things in order to do something for the world.

Once you step back from these whirling forces into quiet regions, you see how great is the illusion! Humanity appears to you like a mass of blind creatures rushing about without knowing what they do or why they do it and only knocking and stumbling against each other. And it is this that they call action and life! It is empty agitation, not action, not true life.

I said once that, to speak usefully for ten minutes, you should remain silent for ten days. I could add that, to act usefully for one day, you should keep quiet for a year! Of course, I am not speaking of the ordinary day-to-day acts that are needed for the common external life, but of those who have or believe that they have something to do for the world. And the silence

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I speak of is the inner quietude that those alone have who can act without being identified with their action, merged into it and blinded and deafened by the noise and form of their own movement. Stand back from your action and rise into an outlook above these temporal motions; enter into the consciousness of Eternity. Then only you will know what true action is.

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What is the relation of human love to Divine love? Is the human an obstacle to the Divine love? Or is not rather the capacity for human love an index to the capacity for Divine love? Have not great spiritual figures, such as Christ, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, been remarkably loving and affectionate by nature?

Love is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it. What you call love and think of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force. But because it is universal, it is not therefore an unconscious force; it is a supremely conscious Power. Consciously it seeks for its manifestation and realisation upon earth; consciously it chooses its instruments, awakens to its vibrations those who are capable of an answer, endeavours to realise in them that which is its eternal aim, and when the instrument is not fit, drops it and turns to look for others. Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love; they see their love come and grow and then it fades — or, it may be, endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement. But their sense in this of a personal experience all their own was an illusion. It was a wave from the everlasting sea of universal love.

Love is universal and eternal; it is always manifesting itself and always identical in its essence. And it is a Divine Force; for the distortions we see in its apparent workings belong to its instruments. Love does not manifest in human beings alone; it is everywhere. Its movement is there in plants, perhaps in the very

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stones; in the animals it is easy to detect its presence. All the deformations of this great and divine Power come from the obscurity and ignorance and selfishness of the limited instrument. Love, the eternal force, has no clinging, no desire, no hunger for possession, no self-regarding attachment; it is, in its pure movement, the seeking for union of the self with the Divine, a seeking absolute and regardless of all other things. Love divine gives itself and asks for nothing. What human beings have made of it, we do not need to say; they have turned it into an ugly and repulsive thing. And yet even in human beings the first contact of love does bring down something of its purer substance; they become capable for a moment of forgetting themselves, for a moment its divine touch awakens and magnifies all that is fine and beautiful. But afterwards there comes to the surface the human nature, full of its impure demands, asking for something in exchange, bartering what it gives, clamouring for its own inferior satisfactions, distorting and soiling what was divine.

To manifest the Divine love you must be capable of receiving the Divine love. For only those can manifest it who are by their nature open to its native movement. The wider and clearer the opening in them, the more they manifest love divine in its original purity; the more it is mixed with the lower human feelings, the greater is the deformation. One who is not open to love in its essence and in its truth cannot approach the Divine. Even the seekers through knowledge come to a point beyond which if they want to go farther, they are bound to find themselves entering at the same time into love and to feel the two as one, knowledge the light of the divine union, love the very heart of knowledge. There is a place in the soul's progress where they meet and you cannot distinguish one from the other. The division, the distinction between the two that you make in the beginning are a creation of the mind: once you rise to a higher level, they disappear.

Among those who have come into this world seeking to reveal the Divine here and transform earthly life, there are some

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who have manifested the Divine love in a greater fullness. In some the purity of the manifestation is so great that they are misunderstood by the whole of humanity and are even accused of being hard and unloving, although the Divine love is there. But it is in them divine and not human in its form as in its substance. For when man speaks of love, he associates it with an emotional and sentimental weakness. But the divine intensity of self-forgetfulness, the capacity of throwing oneself out entirely, making no restriction and no reservation, as a gift, asking nothing in exchange, this is little known to human beings. And when it is there unmixed with weak and sentimental emotions, they find it hard and cold; they cannot recognise in it the very highest and intensest power of love.

The manifestation of the love of the Divine in the world was the great holocaust, the supreme self-giving. The Perfect Consciousness accepted to be merged and absorbed into the unconsciousness of matter, so that consciousness might be awakened in the depths of its obscurity and little by little a Divine Power might rise in it and make the whole of this manifested universe a highest expression of the Divine Consciousness and the Divine love. This was the supreme love, to accept the loss of the perfect condition of supreme divinity, its absolute consciousness, its infinite knowledge, to unite with unconsciousness, to dwell in the world with ignorance and darkness. And yet none perhaps would call it love; for it does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice. The force of love in the world is trying to find consciousnesses that are capable of receiving this divine movement in its purity and expressing it. This race of all beings towards love, this irresistible push and seeking out in the world's heart and in all hearts, is the impulse given by a Divine love behind the human longing and seeking. It touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing; but this constant touch prepares these instruments and suddenly one day there will awake in them the capacity of self-giving, the capacity of loving.

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The movement of love is not limited to human beings and it is perhaps less distorted in other worlds than in the human. Look at the flowers and trees. When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibres up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing, — a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again. There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmanifested here. Once you have come in contact with this large, pure and true Divine love, if you have felt it even for a short time and in its smallest form, you will realise what an abject thing human desire has made of it. It has become in human nature something low, brutal, selfish, violent, ugly, or else it is something weak and sentimental, made up of the pettiest feeling, brittle, superficial, exacting. And this baseness and brutality or this self-regarding weakness they call love!

Is our vital being to take part in the Divine love? If it does, what is the right and correct form of participation it should take?

Where is the manifestation of Divine love intended to stop? Is it to be confined to some unreal or immaterial region? Divine love plunges its manifestation upon earth down into the most material matter. It does not indeed find itself in the selfish distortions of the human consciousness; but the vital in itself is as important an element in Divine love as it is in the whole of the manifested universe. There is no possibility of movement and progress without the mediation of the vital; but because this Power of Nature has been so badly distorted, some prefer to believe that it has to be pulled out altogether and thrown away.

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But it is only through the vital that matter can be touched by the transforming power of the Spirit. If the vital is not there to infuse its dynamism and living force, matter will remain dead; for the higher parts of the being will not come into contact with earth, will not be concretised in life, and they will depart unsatisfied and disappear.

The Divine love of which I speak is a Love that manifests here upon this physical earth, in matter, but it must be pure of its human distortions, if it is to incarnate. The vital is an indispensable agent in this as in all manifestation. But as has happened always, the adverse powers have put their hold on this most precious thing. It is the energy of the vital that enters into dull and insensitive matter and makes it responsive and alive. But the adverse forces have distorted it; they have turned it into a field of violence and selfishness and desire and every kind of ugliness and prevented it from taking part in the divine work. The one thing to be done is to change it, not to suppress its movement or destroy it. For without it no intensity is possible anywhere. The vital is in its very nature that in us which can give itself away. Just because it is that which has always the impulse and the strength to take, it is also that which is capable of giving itself to the utmost; because it knows how to possess, it knows also how to abandon itself without reserve. The true vital movement is the most beautiful and magnificent of movements; but it has been twisted and turned into the most ugly, the most distorted, the most repulsive. Wherever into a human story of love, there has entered even an atom of pure love and it has been allowed to manifest without too much distortion, we find a true and beautiful thing. And if the movement does not last, it is because it is not conscious of its own aim and seeking; it has not the knowledge that it is not the union of one being with another that it is seeking after but the union of all beings with the Divine.

Love is a supreme force which the Eternal Consciousness sent down from itself into an obscure and darkened world that

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it might bring back that world and its beings to the Divine. The material world in its darkness and ignorance had forgotten the Divine. Love came into the darkness; it awakened all that lay there asleep; it whispered, opening the ears that were sealed, "There is something that is worth waking to, worth living for, and it is love!" And with the awakening to love there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. The creation moves upward through love towards the Divine and in answer there leans downward to meet the creation the Divine Love and Grace. Love cannot exist in its pure beauty, love cannot put on its native power and intense joy of fullness until there is this interchange, this fusion between the earth and the Supreme, this movement of Love from the Divine to the creation and from the creation to the Divine. This world was a world of dead matter, till Divine love descended into it and awakened it to life. Ever since it has gone in search of this divine source of life, but it has taken in its search every kind of wrong turn and mistaken way, it has wandered hither and thither in the dark. The mass of this creation has moved on its road like the blind seeking for the unknown, seeking but ignorant of what it sought. The maximum it has reached is what seems to human beings love in its highest form, its purest and most disinterested kind, like the love of the mother for the child. This human movement of love is secretly seeking for something else than what it has yet found; but it does not know where to find it, it does not even know what it is. The moment man's consciousness awakens to the Divine love, pure, independent of all manifestation in human forms, he knows for what his heart has all the time been truly longing. That is the beginning of the Soul's aspiration, that brings the awakening of the consciousness and its yearning for union with the Divine. All the forms that are of the ignorance, all the deformations it has imposed must from that moment fade and disappear and give place to one single movement of the creation answering to the Divine love by its love for the Divine. Once the creation is conscious, awakened, opened to love for the Divine, the Divine

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love pours itself without limit back into the creation. The circle of the movement turns back upon itself and the ends meet; there is the joining of the extremes, supreme Spirit and manifesting Matter, and their divine union becomes constant and complete.

Great beings have taken birth in this world who came to bring down here something of the sovereign purity and power of Divine love. The Divine love has thrown itself into a personal form in them that its realisation upon earth may be at once more easy and more perfect. Divine love, when manifested in a personal being, is easier to realise; it is more difficult when it is unmanifested or impersonal in its movement. A human being, awakened by this personal touch, with this personal intensity, to the consciousness of the Divine love, will find his work and change made more easy; the union for which he seeks becomes more natural and close. And the union, the realisation will become for him, too, more full, more perfect; for the wide uniformity of a universal and impersonal Love will be lit up and vivified with the colour and beauty of all possible relations with the Divine.

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What is exactly the nature of religion? Is it an obstacle in the way of the spiritual life?

Religion belongs to the higher mind of humanity. It is the effort of man's higher mind to approach, as far as lies in its power, something beyond it, something to which humanity gives the name God or Spirit or Truth or Faith or Knowledge or the Infinite, some kind of Absolute, which the human mind cannot reach and yet tries to reach. Religion may be divine in its ultimate origin; in its actual nature it is not divine but human. In truth we should speak rather of religions than of religion; for the religions made by man are many. These different religions, even when they had not the same origin, have most of them been made in the same way. We know how the Christian religion came into existence. It was certainly not Jesus who made what is known as Christianity, but some learned and very clever men put their heads together and built it up into the thing we see. There was nothing divine in the way in which it was formed, and there is nothing divine either in the way in which it functions. And yet the excuse or occasion for the formation was undoubtedly some revelation from what one could call a Divine Being, a Being who came from elsewhere bringing down with him from a higher plane a certain Knowledge and Truth for the earth. He came and suffered for his Truth; but very few understood what he said, few cared to find and hold to the Truth for which he suffered. Buddha retired from the world, sat down in meditation and discovered a way out of earthly suffering and misery, out of all this illness and death and desire and sin and hunger. He saw a Truth which he endeavoured to express and communicate to the disciples and followers who gathered around him. But even before he was dead, his teaching had already begun to be

twisted and distorted. It was only after his disappearance that Buddhism as a full-fledged religion reared its head founded upon what the Buddha is supposed to have said and on the supposed significance of these reported sayings. But soon too, because the disciples and the disciples' disciples could not agree on what the Master had said or what he meant by his utterances, there grew up a host of sects and sub-sects in the body of the parent religion — a Southern Path, a Northern Path, a Far Eastern Path, each of them claiming to be the only, the original, the undefiled doctrine of the Buddha. The same fate overtook the teaching of the Christ; that too came to be made in the same way into a set and organised religion. It is often said that, if Jesus came back, he would not be able to recognise what he taught in the forms that have been imposed on it, and if Buddha were to come back and see what has been made of his teaching, he would immediately run back discouraged to Nirvana! All religions have each the same story to tell. The occasion for its birth is the coming of a great Teacher of the world. He comes and reveals and is the incarnation of a Divine Truth. But men seize upon it, trade upon it, make an almost political organisation out of it. The religion is equipped by them with a government and policy and laws, with its creeds and dogmas, its rules and regulations, its rites and ceremonies, all binding upon its adherents, all absolute and inviolable. Like the State, it too administers rewards to the loyal and assigns punishments for those that revolt or go astray, for the heretic and the renegade.

The first and principal article of these established and formal religions runs always, "Mine is the supreme, the only truth, all others are in falsehood or inferior." For without this fundamental dogma, established credal religions could not have existed. If you do not believe and proclaim that you alone possess the one or the highest truth, you will not be able to impress people and make them flock to you.

This attitude is natural to the religious mind; but it is just that which makes religion stand in the way of the spiritual life.

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The articles and dogmas of a religion are mind-made things and, if you cling to them and shut yourself up in a code of life made out for you, you do not know and cannot know the truth of the Spirit that lies beyond all codes and dogmas, wide and large and free. When you stop at a religious creed and tie yourself in it, taking it for the only truth in the world, you stop the advance and widening of your inner soul. But if you look at religion from another angle, it need not always be an obstacle to all men. If you regard it as one of the higher activities of humanity and if you can see in it the aspirations of man without ignoring the imperfection of all man-made things, it may well be a kind of help for you to approach the spiritual life. Taking it up in a serious and earnest spirit, you can try to find out what truth is there, what aspiration lies hidden in it, what divine inspiration has undergone transformation and deformation here by the human mind and a human organisation, and with an appropriate mental stand you can get religion even as it is to throw some light on your way and to lend some support to your spiritual endeavour.

In all religions we find invariably a certain number of people who possess a great emotional capacity and are full of a real and ardent aspiration, but have a very simple mind and do not feel the need of approaching the Divine through knowledge. For such natures religion has a use and it is even necessary for them; for, through external forms, like the ceremonies of the Church, it offers a kind of support and help to their inner spiritual aspiration. In every religion there are some who have evolved a high spiritual life. But it is not the religion that gave them their spirituality; it is they who have put their spirituality into the religion. Put anywhere else, born into any other cult, they would have found there and lived there the same spiritual life. It is their own capacity, it is some power of their inner being and not the religion they profess that has made them what they are. This power in their nature is such that religion to them does not become a slavery or a bondage. Only as they have

not a strong, clear and active mind, they need to believe in this or that creed as absolutely true and to give themselves up to it without any disturbing question or doubt. I have met in all religions people of this kind and it would be a crime to disturb their faith. For them religion is not an obstacle. An obstacle for those who can go farther, it may be a help for those who cannot, but are yet able to travel a certain distance on the paths of the Spirit. Religion has been an impulse to the worst things and the best; if the fiercest wars have been waged and the most hideous persecutions carried on in its name, it has stimulated too supreme heroism and self-sacrifice in its cause. Along with philosophy it marks the limit the human mind has reached in its highest activities. It is an impediment and a chain if you are a slave to its outer body; if you know how to use its inner substance, it can be your jumping-board into the realm of the Spirit.

One who holds a particular faith or who has found out some truth, is disposed to think that he alone has found the Truth, whole and entire. This is human nature. A mixture of falsehood seems necessary for human beings to stand on their legs and move on their way. If the vision of the Truth were suddenly given to them they would be crushed under the weight.

Each time that something of the Divine Truth and the Divine Force comes down to manifest upon earth, some change is effected in the earth's atmosphere. In the descent, those who are receptive are awakened to some inspiration from it, some touch, some beginning of sight. If they were capable of holding and expressing rightly what they receive, they would say, "A great force has come down; I am in contact with it and what I understand of it, I will tell you." But most of them are not capable of that, because they have small minds. They get illumined, possessed, as it were, and cry, "I have the Divine Truth, I possess it whole and entire." There are now upon earth at least two dozen Christs, if not as many Buddhas; India alone can supply any number of Avatars, not to speak of minor manifestations. But in this way,

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the whole thing begins to look grotesque; but if you see what is behind, it is not so stupid as it seems at the first glance. The truth is that the human personality has come in contact with some Being, some Power, and under the influence of education and tradition calls it Buddha or Christ or by any other familiar name. It is difficult to affirm that it was Buddha himself or the very Christ with whom there was the contact, but none can assert either that the inspiration did not come from that which inspired the Christ or the Buddha. These human vessels may very well have received the inspiration from some such source. If they were modest and simple, they would be content to say that much and no more; they would say, "I have received this inspiration from such and such a Great One", but instead they proclaim, "I am that Great One." I knew one who affirmed that he was both Christ and Buddha! He had received something, had experienced a truth, had seen the Divine Presence in himself and in others. But the experience was too strong for him, the truth too great. He became half crazy and the next day went out into the streets, proclaiming that in him Christ and Buddha had become one.

One Divine Consciousness is here working through all these beings, preparing its way through all these manifestations. At this day it is here at work upon earth more powerfully than it has ever been before. There are some who receive its touch in some way, or to some degree; but what they receive they distort, they make their own thing out of it. Others feel the touch but cannot bear the force and go mad under the pressure. But some have the capacity to receive and the strength to bear, and it is they who will become the vessels of the full knowledge, the chosen instruments and agents.

If you want to appraise the real value of the religion in which you are born or brought up or to have a correct perspective of the country or society to which you belong by birth, if you want to find out how relative a thing the particular environment is into which you happened to be thrown and confined, you have

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only to go round the earth and see that what you think good is looked upon as bad elsewhere and what is considered as bad in one place is welcomed as good in another. All countries and all religions are built up out of a mass of traditions. In all of them you will meet saints and heroes and great and mighty personalities as well as small and wicked people. You will then perceive what a mockery it is to say, "Because I am brought up in this religion, therefore it is the only true religion; because I am born in this country, therefore it is the best of all countries." One might as well make the same claim for his family, "Because I come of this family that has lived in the same place for so many years or so many centuries, therefore I am bound by its traditions; they alone are the ideal."

Things have an inner value and become real to you only when you have acquired them by the exercise of your free choice, not when they have been imposed upon you. If you want to be sure of your religion, you must choose it; if you want to be sure of your country, you must choose it; if you want to be sure of your family, even that you must choose. If you accept without question what has been given you by Chance, you can never be sure whether it is good or bad for you, whether it is the true thing for your life. Step back from all that forms your natural environment or inheritance, made up and forced upon you by Nature's blind mechanical process; draw within and look quietly and dispassionately at things. Appraise them, choose freely. Then you can say with an inner truth, "This is my family, this my country, this my religion."

If we go a little way within ourselves, we shall discover that there is in each of us a consciousness that has been living throughout the ages and manifesting in a multitude of forms. Each of us has been born in many different countries, belonged to many different nations, followed many different religions. Why must we accept the last one as the best? The experiences gathered by us in all these many lives in different countries and varying religions, are stored up in that inner continuity of our

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consciousness which persists through all births. There are multiple personalities there created by these past experiences, and when we become aware of this multitude within us, it becomes impossible to speak of one particular form of truth as the only truth, one country as our only country, one religion as the only true religion. There are people who have been born into one country, although the leading elements of their consciousness obviously belong to another. I have met some born in Europe who were evidently Indians; I have met others born in Indian bodies who were as evidently Europeans. In Japan I have met some who were Indian, others who were European. And if any of them goes to the country or enters into the civilisation to which he has affinity, he finds himself there perfectly at home.

If your aim is to be free, in the freedom of the Spirit, you must get rid of all the ties that are not the inner truth of your being, but come from subconscious habits. If you wish to consecrate yourself entirely, absolutely and exclusively to the Divine, you must do it in all completeness; you must not leave bits of yourself tied here and there. You may object that it is not easy to cut away altogether from one's moorings. But have you never looked back and observed the changes that have taken place in you in the course of a few years? When you do that, almost always you ask yourself how it was that you could have felt in the way you felt and acted as you did act in certain circumstances; at times, even, you can no longer recognise yourself in the person you were only ten years ago. How can you then bind yourself to what was or to what is or how can you fix beforehand what may or may not be in the future?

All your relations must be newly built upon an inner freedom of choice. The traditions in which you live or are brought up have been imposed on you by the pressure of the environment or by the general mind or by the choice of others. There is an element of compulsion in your acquiescence. Religion itself has been imposed on men; it is often supported by a suggestion of religious fear or by some spiritual or other menace. There

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can be no such imposition in your relation with the Divine; it must be free, your own mind's and heart's choice, taken up with enthusiasm and joy. What union can that be in which one trembles and says, "I am compelled, I cannot do otherwise"? Truth is self-evident and has not to be imposed upon the world. It does not feel the need of being accepted by men. For it is self-existent; it does not live by what people say of it or on their adherence. But one who is founding a religion needs to have many followers. The strength and greatness of a religion is adjudged by men according to the number of those that follow it, although the real greatness is not there. The greatness of spiritual truth is not in numbers. I knew the head of a new religion, the son of its founder, and heard him say once that such and such a religion took so many hundreds of years to be built up, and such another so many hundreds of years, but they within fifty years had already over four million followers. "And so you see", he added, "what a great religion is ours!" Religions may reckon their greatness by the number of their believers, but Truth would still be Truth if it had not even a single follower. The average man is drawn towards those who make great pretensions; he does not go where Truth is quietly manifesting. Those who make great pretensions need to proclaim loudly and to advertise; for otherwise they would not attract great numbers of people. The work that is done with no care for what people think of it is not so well known, does not so easily draw multitudes. But Truth requires no advertisement; it does not hide itself but it does not proclaim itself either. It is content to manifest, regardless of results, not seeking approbation or shunning disapprobation, not attracted or troubled by the world's acceptance or denial.

When you come to the Yoga, you must be ready to have all your mental buildings and all your vital scaffoldings shattered to pieces. You must be prepared to be suspended in the air with nothing to support you except your faith. You will have to forget your past self and its clingings altogether, to pluck it out of your consciousness and be born anew, free from every kind

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of bondage. Think not of what you were, but of what you aspire to be; be altogether in what you want to realise. Turn from your dead past and look straight towards the future. Your religion, country, family lie there; it is the DIVINE.

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Can all physical ailments be traced to some disorder in the mind as their ultimate source? If so, what kind of mental disorder would produce such an ailment as, for example, prickly heat or sore throat?

There are as many reasons for an illness as there are people who fall ill; the explanation is different in each case. If you ask me, "Why have I this ailment or that?" I can look and tell you the reason, but there is no general rule.

The ailments of the body are not always the outcome of a mental disorder, disharmony or wrong movement. The source of the malady may be something in the mind, it may be something in the vital; or it may be something more or less purely physical, as in illnesses that arise from an outer contact. Again, the disturbance may be the result of a movement in the Yoga, and in that case too there is a multitude of possible causes.

Let us take up the illnesses that are due to Yoga; for our concern is more directly and intimately with them. Here, although no one reason can be given for any particular illness, yet we can separate them into various groups according to the nature of the causes that provoke them.

The force that comes down into one who is doing Yoga and helps him in his transformation, acts along many different lines and its results vary according to the nature that receives it and the work to be done. First of all, it hastens the transformation of all in the being that is ready to be transformed. If he is open and receptive in his mind, the mind, touched by the power of Yoga, begins to change and progress swiftly. There may be the same rapidity of change in the vital consciousness if that is ready, or even in the body. But in the body the transforming power of Yoga is operative only to a certain degree; for the receptivity

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of the body is limited. The most material plane of the universe is still in a condition in which receptivity is mixed with a large amount of resistance. But rapid progress in one part of the being which is not followed by an equivalent progress in other parts produces a disharmony in the nature, a dislocation somewhere; and wherever or whenever this dislocation occurs, it can translate itself into an illness. The nature of the illness depends upon the nature of the dislocation. One kind of disharmony affects the mind and the disturbance it produces may lead even as far as insanity; another kind affects the body and may show itself as fever or prickly heat or any other greater or minor disorder.

On one side, the action of the forces of Yoga hastens the movement of transformation of the being in those parts that are ready to receive and respond to the power that is at work upon it. Yoga, in this way, saves time. The whole world is in a process of progressive transformation; if you take up the discipline of Yoga, you speed up in yourself this process. The work that would require years in the ordinary course, can be done by Yoga in a few days and even in a few hours. But it is your inner consciousness that obeys this accelerating impulse; for the higher parts of your being readily follow the swift and concentrated movement of Yoga and lend themselves more easily to the continuous adjustment and adaptation that it necessitates. The body, on the other hand, is ordinarily dense, inert and apathetic. And if you have in this part something that is not responsive, if there is a resistance here, the reason is that the body is incapable of moving as quickly as the rest of the being. It must take time, it must walk at its own pace as it does in ordinary life. What happens is as when grown-up people walk too fast for children in their company; they have to stop at times and wait till the child who is lagging behind comes up and overtakes them. This divergence between the progress in the inner being and the inertia of the body often creates a dislocation in the system, and that manifests itself as an illness. This is why people who take up Yoga frequently begin by suffering from some physical discomfort or disorder. That need

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not happen if they are on their guard and careful. Or if there is a greater and unusual receptivity in the body, then too they escape. But an unmixed receptivity making the physical parts closely follow the pace of the inner transformation is hardly possible, unless the body has already been prepared in the past for the processes of Yoga.

In the ordinary life of man a progressive dislocation is the rule. The mental and the vital beings of man follow as best they can the movement of the universal forces, and the stream of the world's inner transformation and evolution carries them a certain way; but the body bound to the law of the most material nature, moves very slowly. After some years, seventy or eighty, a hundred or two hundred, — and that is perhaps the maximum, — the dislocation is so serious that the outer being falls to pieces. The divergence between the demand and the answer, the increasing inability and irresponsiveness of the body, brings about the phenomenon of death. By Yoga the inner transformation that is in slow constant process in the creation is rendered more intense and rapid, but the pace of the outer transformation remains almost the same as in ordinary life. As a result, the disharmony between the inner and the outer being in one who is doing Yoga tends to be all the greater, unless precautions are taken and a protection secured that will help the body to follow the inner march as closely as possible. Even then it is the very nature of the body to hold you back. It is for this reason that to many we are obliged to say, "Do not pull, do not hurry; you must give your body time to follow." Some have to be kept back even for years and not allowed to do much or progress far. Sometimes, to avoid the disequilibrium becomes impossible; and then you have a disturbance which varies according to the nature of the resistance and the measure of the care you have taken or your negligence. This too is the reason why each time that there is a strong movement of progress, it is almost invariably followed by a period of immobility, which seems to those who are not warned a spell of dullness and stagnation and discouragement in

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which all progress is stopped, and they think anxiously, "What is the matter? Am I losing time? Nothing is being done." But the truth is that it is the time needed for assimilation; a pause is made for the body to open itself more and become receptive and approach nearer to the level attained by the inner consciousness. The parents have been walking too far ahead; they must halt so that the child left behind may run up and catch them by the hand; only then can they start again on the journey together.

Each spot of the body is symbolical of an inner movement; there is there a world of subtle correspondences. But this is a long and complex subject and we cannot enter into its details just now. 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.

The origin of an illness may be in the mind; it may be in the vital; it may be in any of the parts of the being. One and the same illness may be due to a variety of causes; it may spring in different cases from different sources of disharmony. And there may be too an appearance of illness where there is no real illness at all. In that case, if you are sufficiently conscious, you will see that there is just a friction somewhere, some halting in the movement, and by setting it right you will be cured at once. This kind of malady has no truth in it, even when it seems to have physical effects. It is half made up of imagination and has not the same grip on matter as a true illness.

In short, the sources of an illness are manifold and intricate; each can have a multitude of causes, but always it indicates where is the weak part in the being.

To whatever cause an illness may be due, material or mental, external or internal, it must, before it can affect the physical body, touch another layer of the being that surrounds and protects it. This subtler layer is called in different teachings by various names, — the etheric body, the nervous envelope. It is a subtle body and yet almost visible. In density something like the vibrations that you see around a very hot and steaming object, it emanates from the physical body and closely covers it. All communications with the exterior world are made through this medium, and it is this that must be invaded and penetrated first before the body can be affected. If this envelope is absolutely strong and intact, you can go into places infested with the worst of diseases, even plague and cholera, and remain quite immune. It is a perfect protection against all possible attacks of illness, so long as it is whole and entire, thoroughly consistent in its composition, its elements in faultless balance. This body is built up, on the one side, of a material basis, but rather of material conditions than of physical matter, on the other, of the vibrations of our psychological states. Peace and equanimity and confidence, faith in health, undisturbed repose and cheerfulness and bright gladness constitute this element in it and give it strength and substance. It is a very sensitive medium with facile and quick reactions; it readily takes in all kinds of suggestions and these can rapidly change and almost remould its condition. A bad suggestion acts very strongly upon it; a good suggestion operates in the contrary sense with the same force. Depression and discouragement have a very adverse effect; they cut out holes in it, as it were, in its very stuff, render it weak and unresisting and open to hostile attacks an easy passage.

It is the action of this medium that partly explains why people often feel a spontaneous and unreasoning attraction or repulsion for each other. The first seat of these reactions is in this protecting envelope. Easily we feel attracted towards people who bring a reinforcement to our nervous envelope; we are repelled by those who disturb or hurt it. Whatever gives it a

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sense of expansion and comfort and ease, whatever makes it respond with a feeling of happiness and pleasure exercises on us at once an attraction; when the effect is in the contrary sense, it responds with a protecting repulsion. This movement, when two people meet, is often mutual. It is not, of course, the only cause of affinities, but it is one and a very frequent cause.

If the whole being could simultaneously advance in its progressive transformation, keeping pace with the inner march of the universe, there would be no illness, there would be no death. But it would have to be literally the whole being integrally from the highest planes, where it is more plastic and yields in the required measure to transforming forces, down to the most material, which is by nature rigid, stationary, refractory to any rapid remoulding change.

There are certain regions which offer a much stronger resistance than others to the action of the Yogic forces, and the illnesses affecting them are harder to cure. They are those parts that belong to the most material layers of the being, and the illnesses that pertain to them, as, for instance, skin diseases or bad teeth. Sri Aurobindo spoke once of a Yogi who, still enjoying robust health and a magnificent physique, had been living for nearly a century on the banks of the Narmada. Offered by a disciple medicine for a toothache, he observed, in refusing, that one tooth had given him trouble for the last two hundred years. This Yogi had secured so much control over material nature as to live two hundred years, but in all that time he had not been able to conquer a toothache.

Some of the diseases which are considered most dangerous are the easiest to cure; some that are considered as of very little importance can offer the most obstinate resistance.

The sources of an illness are manifold and intricate; each can have a multitude of causes, but always it indicates where is the weak part in the being.

Nine-tenths of the danger in an illness comes from fear. Fear can give you the apparent symptoms of an illness; and it

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can give you the illness too, — its effects can go so far as that. Not so long ago the wife of one who frequents the Ashram but is not herself practising Yoga, heard that there was cholera in the house where her milkman lived; fear took her and the next moment she began to show symptoms of the disease. She could however be rapidly cured, because the apparent symptoms were not allowed to develop into the real illness.

There are physical movements, effects of the pressure of the Yoga, which sometimes create ungrounded fears that may do harm if the fear is not rejected. There is, for instance, a certain pressure in the head of which there has been question and which is felt by many, especially in the earlier stages, when something that is still closed has to open. It is a discomfort that comes to nothing and can easily be got over, if you know that it is an effect of the pressure of the forces to which you are opening, when they work strongly on the body to produce a result and to hasten the transformation. Taken quietly, it can turn into a not unpleasurable sensation. But if you get frightened, you are sure to contract a very bad headache; it may even go as far as a fever. The discomfort is due to some resistance in the nature; if you know how to release the resistance, you are immediately free of the discomfort. But get frightened and the discomfort may turn into something much worse. Whatever the character of the experience you have, you must give no room to fear; you must keep an unshaken confidence and feel that whatever happens is the thing that had to happen. Once you have chosen the path, you must boldly accept all the consequences of your choice. But if you choose and then draw back and choose again and again draw back, always wavering, always doubting, always fearful, you create a disharmony in your being, which not only retards your progress, but can be the origin of all kinds of disturbance in the mind and vital being and discomfort and disease in the body.

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Can a Yogi attain to a state of consciousness in which he can know all things, answer all questions, relating even to abstruse scientific problems, such as, for example, the theory of relativity?

Theoretically and in principle it is not impossible for a Yogi to know everything; all depends upon the Yogi.

But there is knowledge and knowledge. The Yogi does not know in the way of the mind. He does not know everything in the sense that he has access to all possible information or because he contains all the facts of the universe in his mind or because his consciousness is a sort of miraculous encyclopaedia. He knows by his capacity for a containing or dynamic identity with things and persons and forces. Or he knows because he lives in a plane of consciousness or is in contact with a consciousness in which there is the truth and the knowledge.

If you are in the true consciousness, the knowledge you have will also be of the truth. Then, too, you can know directly, by being one with what you know. If a problem is put before you, if you are asked what is to be done in a particular matter, you can then, by looking with enough attention and concentration, receive spontaneously the required knowledge and the true answer. It is not by any careful application of theory that you reach the knowledge or by working it out through a mental process. The scientific mind needs these methods to come to its conclusions. But the Yogi's knowledge is direct and immediate; it is not deductive. If an engineer has to find out the exact position for the building of an arch, the line of its curve and the size of its opening, he does it by calculation, collating and deducing from his information and data. But a Yogi needs none of these things; he looks, has the vision of the thing, sees that it is to be done in

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this way and not in another, and this seeing is his knowledge.

Although it may be true in a general way and in a certain sense that a Yogi can know all things and can answer all questions from his own field of vision and consciousness, yet it does not follow that there are no questions whatever of any kind to which he would not or could not answer. A Yogi who has the direct knowledge, the knowledge of the true truth of things, would not care or perhaps would find it difficult to answer questions that belong entirely to the domain of human mental constructions. It may be, he could not or would not wish to solve problems and difficulties you might put to him which touch only the illusion of things and their appearances. The working of his knowledge is not in the mind. If you put him some silly mental query of that character, he probably would not answer. The very common conception that you can put any ignorant question to him as to some super-schoolmaster or demand from him any kind of information past, present or future and that he is bound to answer, is a foolish idea. It is as inept as the expectation from the spiritual man of feats and miracles that would satisfy the vulgar external mind and leave it gaping with wonder.

Moreover, the term "Yogi" is very vague and wide. There are many types of Yogis, many lines or ranges of spiritual or occult endeavour and different heights of achievement, there are some whose powers do not extend beyond the mental level; there are others who have gone beyond it. Everything depends on the field or nature of their effort, the height to which they have arrived, the consciousness with which they have contact or into which they enter.

*Do not scientists go sometimes beyond the mental plane?
It is said that Einstein found his theory of relativity not
through any process of reasoning, but through some kind
of sudden inspiration. Has that inspiration anything to
do with the Supermind?*

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The scientist who gets an inspiration revealing to him a new truth, receives it from the intuitive mind. The knowledge comes as a direct perception in the higher mental plane illumined by some other light still farther above. But all that has nothing to do with the action of Supermind and this higher mental level is far removed from the supramental plane. Men are too easily inclined to believe that they have climbed into regions quite divine when they have only gone above the average level. There are many stages between the ordinary human mind and the Supermind, many grades and many intervening planes. If an ordinary man were to get into direct contact even with one of these intermediate planes, he would be dazzled and blinded, would be crushed under the weight of the sense of immensity or would lose his balance; and yet it is not the Supermind.

Behind the common idea that a Yogi can know all things and answer all questions is the actual fact that there is a plane in the mind where the memory of everything is stored and remains always in existence. All mental movements that belong to the life of the earth are memorised and registered in this plane. Those who are capable of going there and care to take the trouble, can read in it and learn anything they choose. But this region must not be mistaken for the supramental levels. And yet to reach even there you must be able to silence the movements of the material or physical mind; you must be able to leave aside all your sensations and put a stop to your ordinary mental movements, whatever they are; you must get out of the vital; you must become free from the slavery of the body. Then only you can enter into that region and see. But if you are sufficiently interested to make this effort, you can arrive there and read what is written in the earth's memory.

Thus, if you go deep into silence, you can reach a level of consciousness on which it is not impossible for you to receive answers to all your questions. And if there is one who is consciously open to the plenary truth of the supermind, in constant contact with it, he can certainly answer any question that is

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worth an answer from the supramental Light. The queries put must come from some sense of the truth and reality behind things. There are many questions and much debated problems that are cobwebs woven of mere mental abstractions or move on the illusory surface of things. These do not pertain to real knowledge; they are a deformation of knowledge, their very substance is of the ignorance. Certainly the supramental knowledge may give an answer, its own answer, to the problems set by the mind's ignorance; but it is likely that it would not be at all satisfactory or perhaps even intelligible to those who ask from the mental level. You must not expect the supramental to work in the way of the mind or demand that the knowledge in truth should be capable of being pieced together with the half-knowledge in ignorance. The scheme of the mind is one thing, but Supermind is quite another and it would no longer be supramental if it adapted itself to the exigencies of the mental scheme. The two are incommensurable and cannot be put together.

When the consciousness has attained to supramental joys, does it no longer take interest in the things of the mind?

The supramental does not take interest in mental things in the same way as the mind. It takes its own interest in all the movements of the universe, but it is from a different point of view and with a different vision. The world presents to it an entirely different appearance; there is a reversal of outlook and everything is seen from there as other than what it seems to the mind and often even the opposite. Things have another meaning; their aspect, their motion and process, everything about them, are watched with other eyes. Everything here is followed by the supermind; the mind movements and not less the vital, the material movements, all the play of the universe have for it a very deep interest, but of another kind. It is about the same difference as that between the interest taken in a puppet-play by one who

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holds the strings and knows what the puppets are to do and the will that moves them and that they can do only what it moves them to do, and the interest taken by another who observes the play but sees only what is happening from moment to moment and knows nothing else. The one who follows the play and is outside its secret has a stronger, an eager and passionate interest in what will happen and he gives an excited attention to its unforeseen or dramatic events; the other, who holds the strings and moves the show, is unmoved and tranquil. There is a certain intensity of interest which comes from ignorance and is bound up with illusion, and that must disappear when you are out of the ignorance. The interest that human beings take in things founds itself on the illusion; if that were removed, they would have no interest at all in the play; they would find it dry and dull. That is why all this ignorance, all this illusion has lasted so long; it is because men like it, because they cling to it and its peculiar kind of appeal that it endures.

What should one do who wants to change his bodily condition, effect a cure or correct some physical imperfection? Should he concentrate upon the end to be realised and exercise his will-power or should he only live in the confidence that it will be done or trust in the Divine Power to bring about the desired result in its own time and in its own way?

All these are so many ways of doing the same thing and each in different conditions can be effective. The method by which you will be most successful depends on the consciousness you have developed and the character of the forces you are able to bring into play. You can live in the consciousness of the completed cure or change and by the force of your inner formation slowly bring about the outward change. Or if you know and have the vision of the force that is able to effect these things and if you have the skill to handle it, you can call it down and apply it in the parts

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where its action is needed, and it will work out the change. Or, again, you can present your difficulty to the Divine and ask of It the cure, putting confidently your trust in the Divine Power.

But whatever you do, whatever the process you use, and even if you happen to have acquired in it a great skill and power, you must leave the result in the hands of the Divine. Always you may try, but it is for the Divine to give you the fruit of your effort or not to give it. There your personal power stops; if the result comes, it is the Divine Power and not yours that brings it. You question if it is right to ask the Divine for these things. But there is no more harm in turning to the Divine for the removal of a physical imperfection than in praying for the removal of a moral defect. But whatever you ask for or whatever your effort, you must feel, even while trying your best, using knowledge or putting forth power, that the result depends upon the Divine Grace. Once you have taken up the Yoga, whatever you do must be done in a spirit of complete surrender. This must be your attitude, — “I aspire, I try to cure my imperfections, I do my best, but for the result I put myself entirely into the hands of the Divine.”

Does it help, if you say, “I am sure of the result, I know that the Divine will give me what I want”?

You may take it in that way. The very intensity of your faith may mean that the Divine has already chosen that the thing it points to shall be done. An unshakable faith is a sign of the presence of the Divine Will, an evidence of what shall be.

What are the forces that are in operation when one is in silent meditation?

That depends upon the one who meditates.

But in silent meditation does he not make himself a

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complete blank? Then how can anything depend upon him?

Even if you make yourself an absolute blank, that does not change the nature of your aspiration or alter its domain. In some the aspiration moves on the mental level or in the vital field; some have a spiritual aspiration. On the quality of the aspiration depends the force that answers and the work that it comes to do. To make yourself blank in meditation creates an inner silence; it does not mean that you have become nothing or have become a dead and inert mass. Making yourself an empty vessel, you invite that which shall fill it. It means that you release the stress of your inner consciousness towards realisation. The nature of the consciousness and the degree of its stress determine the forces that you bring into play and whether they shall help and fulfil or fail or even harm and hinder.

There are many varying conditions in which you may meditate and all have their effect upon the forces brought in or brought down and on their working. If you sit alone, it is your own inner and outer condition that matters. If you sit with others, the general condition is of primary importance. But in either case the conditions will always vary and the forces that answer will never be twice the same. A united concentration rightly done can be a great force. There is an old saying that if twelve sincere persons unite their will and their aspiration and call the Divine, the Divine is bound to manifest. But the will must be one-pointed, the aspiration sincere. For those who make the attempt can be united in inertia or even in mistaken or perverse desire, and the result is then likely to be disastrous.

In your meditation the first imperative need is a state of perfect and absolute sincerity in all the consciousness. It is indispensable that you should not deceive yourself or deceive or be deceived by others. Often people have a wish, a mental preference or vital desire; they want the experience to happen in a particular way or to take a turn that satisfies their ideas or

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desires or preferences; they do not keep themselves blank and unprejudiced and simply and sincerely observe what happens. Then if you do not like what happens, it is easy to deceive yourself; you will see one thing, but give it a little twist and make it something else, or you will distort something simple and straightforward or magnify it into an extraordinary experience. When you sit in meditation you must be as candid and simple as a child, not interfering by your external mind, expecting nothing, insisting on nothing. Once this condition is there, all the rest depends upon the aspiration deep within you. If you ask from within for peace, it will come; if for strength, for power, for knowledge, they too will come, but all in the measure of your capacity to receive it. And if you call upon the Divine, then too — always admitting that the Divine is open to your call, and that means your call is pure enough and strong enough to reach him, — you will have the answer.

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What is the ground of the repulsion that one instinctively feels towards certain animals, such as snakes and scorpions?

It is not an inevitable necessity that one should feel this or any other repulsion. To have no repulsion at all is one of the fundamental achievements of Yoga.

The repulsion you speak of comes from fear; if there were no fear, it would not exist. This fear is not based on reason, it is instinctive; it is not individual, but racial; it is a general suggestion and belongs to the consciousness of humanity as a whole. When one takes up the human body, one accepts along with it a mass of these general suggestions, race ideas, race feelings of mankind, associations, attractions, repulsions, fears.

But from another viewpoint there is something very personal in the nature of an attraction or repulsion; for these movements are not the same for everybody and depend mostly on the quality of vibration of the vital being in different people. There are men who not only do not feel any repulsion for creatures like snakes, but have even a liking for them, a vital attraction and preference.

The world is full of things that are not pleasing or beautiful, but that is no reason why one should live in a constant feeling of repulsion for these things. All feelings of shrinking and disgust and fear that disturb and weaken the human mind can be overcome. A Yogi has to overcome these reactions; for almost the very first step in Yoga demands that you must keep a perfect equanimity in the presence of all beings and things and happenings. Always you must remain calm, untouched and unmoved; the strength of the Yogi lies there. An entire calmness

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and quietness will disarm even dangerous and ferocious animals when they confront you.

Repulsion is a movement of ignorance. It is an instinctive gesture of self-defence. But what best protects you against any danger is not an unreasoning recoil but knowledge, knowledge of the nature of the danger and a conscious application of the means that will remove or nullify it. The ignorance from which these movements rise is a general human condition, but it can be conquered; for we are not bound to the crude human nature from which the external being starts and which is all around us.

Ignorance is dispelled by a growing consciousness; what you need is consciousness and always more consciousness, a consciousness pure, simple and luminous. In the light of this perfected consciousness, things appear as they are and not as they want to appear. It is like a screen faithfully recording all things as they pass. You see there what is luminous and what is dark, what is straight and what is crooked. Your consciousness becomes a screen or mirror; but this is when you are in a state of contemplation, a mere observer; when you are active, it is like a searchlight. You have only to turn it on, if you want to see luminously and examine penetratingly anything in any place.

The way to attain to this perfect consciousness is to increase your actual consciousness beyond its present grooves and limits, to educate it, to open it to the Divine Light and to let the Divine Light work in it fully and freely. But the Light can do its full and unhindered work only when you have got rid of all craving and fear, when you have no mental prejudices, no vital preferences, no physical apprehensions or attractions to obscure or bind you.

Repulsion is a movement of weakness. It comes because you have been touched and hurt and recoil from what hurts you. The atmosphere of a being or man or animal or its emanations may be harmful for you, although it may not be so felt by

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everybody, and directly it touches you, you shrink back from it. But if you were strong enough, you could stop the danger at a distance and not let it reach or hurt you. For you would see and know at once that there was something harmful there and put a barrier of defence around you, and, even if the thing came near, it would not be able to touch you; you would remain unhurt and unmoved by its presence.

If the Divine that is all love is the source of the creation, whence have come all the evils that abound upon earth?

All is from the Divine; but the One Consciousness, the Supreme has not created the world directly out of itself; a Power has gone out from it and has descended through many gradations of its workings and passed through many agents. There are many creators or rather “formateurs”, form-makers, who have presided over the creation of the world. They are intermediary agents and I prefer to call them “Formateurs” and not “Creators”; for what they have done is to give a form and turn and nature to matter. There have been many, and some have formed things harmonious and benignant and some have shaped things mischievous and evil. And some too have been distorters rather than builders, for they have interfered and spoiled what was begun well by others.

Is not this material world of ours very low down in the scale in the system of worlds that form the creation?

Ours is the most material world, but it is not necessarily “low down”, at least, not for that reason; if it is low down, it is because it is obscure and ignorant, not because it is material. It is a mistake to make “matter” a synonym for obscurity and ignorance. And the material world too is not the only world in which we live: it is rather one of many in which we exist simultaneously, and in one way the most important of them all.

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For this world of matter is the point of concentration of all the worlds; it is the field of concretisation of all the worlds; it is the place where all the worlds will have to manifest. At present it is disharmonious and obscure; but that is only an accident, a false start. One day it will become beautiful, rhythmic, full of light; for that is the consummation for which it was made.

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Is it possible for a Yogi to become an artist or can an artist be a Yogi? What is the relation of Art to Yoga?

The two are not so antagonistic as you seem to think. There is nothing to prevent a Yogi from being an artist or an artist from being a Yogi. But when you are in Yoga, there is a profound change in the values of things, of Art as of everything else; you begin to look at Art from a very different standpoint. It is no longer the one supreme all-engrossing thing for you, no longer an end in itself. Art is a means, not an end; it is a means of expression. And the artist then ceases too to believe that the whole world turns round what he is doing or that his work is the most important thing that has ever been done. His personality counts no longer; he is an agent, a channel, his art a means of expressing his relations with the Divine. He uses it for that purpose as he might have used any other means that were part of the powers of his nature.

But does an artist feel at all any impulse to create once he takes up Yoga?

Why should he not have the impulse? He can express his relation with the Divine in the way of his art, exactly as he would in any other. If you want art to be the true and highest art, it must be the expression of a divine world brought down into this material world. All true artists have some feeling of this kind, some sense that they are intermediaries between a higher world and this physical existence. If you consider it in this light, Art is not very different from Yoga. But most often the artist has only an indefinite feeling, he has not the knowledge. Still, I knew some who had it; they worked consciously at their art

with the knowledge. In their creation they did not put forward their personality as the most important factor; they considered their work as an offering to the Divine, they tried to express by it their relation with the Divine.

This was the avowed function of Art in the Middle Ages. The “primitive” painters, the builders of cathedrals in Mediaeval Europe had no other conception of art. In India all her architecture, her sculpture, her painting have proceeded from this source and were inspired by this ideal. The songs of Mirabai and the music of Thyagaraja, the poetic literature built up by her devotees, saints and Rishis rank among the world’s greatest artistic possessions.

But does the work of an artist improve if he does Yoga?

The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. Why then should not Yogic consciousness be a help to artistic creation? I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting. Two examples I can cite to you. One was a girl who had no education whatever; she was a dancer and danced tolerably well. After she took up Yoga, she danced only for friends; but her dancing attained a depth of expression and beauty which was not there before. And although she was not educated, she began to write wonderful things; for she had visions and expressed them in the most beautiful language. But there were ups and

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downs in her Yoga, and when she was in a good condition, she wrote beautifully, but otherwise was quite dull and stupid and uncreative. The second case is that of a boy who had studied art, but only just a little. The son of a diplomat, he had been trained for the diplomatic career; but he lived in luxury and his studies did not go far. Yet as soon as he took up Yoga, he began to produce inspired drawings which carried the expression of an inner knowledge and were symbolic in character; in the end he became a great artist.

Why are artists generally irregular in their conduct and loose in character?

When they are so, it is because they live usually in the vital plane, and the vital part in them is extremely sensitive to the forces of that world and receives from it all kinds of impressions and impulsions over which they have no controlling power. And often too they are very free in their minds and do not believe in the petty social conventions and moralities that govern the life of ordinary people. They do not feel bound by the customary rules of conduct and have not yet found an inner law that would replace them. As there is nothing to check the movements of their desire-being, they lead easily a life of liberty or license. But this does not happen with all. I lived ten years among artists and found many of them to be bourgeois to the core; they were married and settled, good fathers, good husbands, and lived up to the most strict moral ideas of what should and what should not be done.

There is one way in which Yoga may stop the artist's productive impulse. If the origin of his art is in the vital world, once he becomes a Yogi he will lose his inspiration or, rather, the source from which his inspiration used to come will inspire him no more, for then the vital world appears in its true light; it puts on its true value, and that value is very relative. Most of those who call themselves artists draw their inspiration from the

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vital world only; and it carries in it no high or great significance. But when a true artist, one who looks for his creative source to a higher world, turns to Yoga, he will find that his inspiration becomes more direct and powerful and his expression clearer and deeper. Of those who possess a true value the power of Yoga will increase the value, but from one who has only some false appearance of art even that appearance will vanish or else lose its appeal. To one earnest in Yoga, the first simple truth that strikes his opening vision is that what he does is a very relative thing in comparison with the universal manifestation, the universal movement. But an artist is usually vain and looks on himself as a highly important personage, a kind of demigod in the human world. Many artists say that if they did not believe what they do to be of a supreme importance, they would not be able to do it. But I have known some whose inspiration was from a higher world and yet they did not believe that what they did was of so immense an importance. That is nearer the spirit of true art. If a man is truly led to express himself in art, it is the way the Divine has chosen to manifest in him, and then by Yoga his art will gain and not lose. But there is all the question: is the artist appointed by the Divine or self-appointed?

But if one does Yoga can he rise to such heights as Shakespeare or Shelley? There has been no such instance.

Why not? The Mahabharata and Ramayana are certainly not inferior to anything created by Shakespeare or any other poet, and they are said to have been the work of men who were Rishis and had done Yogic *tapasyā*. The Gita which, like the Upanishads, ranks at once among the greatest literary and the greatest spiritual works, was not written by one who had no experience of Yoga. And where is the inferiority to your Milton and Shelley in the famous poems written whether in India or Persia or elsewhere by men known to be saints, Sufis, devotees? And, then, do you know all the Yogis and their work? Among

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the poets and creators can you say who were or who were not in conscious touch with the Divine? There are some who are not officially Yogis, they are not *gurus* and have no disciples; the world does not know what they do; they are not anxious for fame and do not attract to themselves the attention of men; but they have the higher consciousness, are in touch with a Divine Power, and when they create they create from there. The best paintings in India and much of the best statuary and architecture were done by Buddhist monks who passed their lives in spiritual contemplation and practice; they did supreme artistic work, but did not care to leave their names to posterity. The chief reason why Yogis are not usually known by their art is that they do not consider their art-expression as the most important part of their life and do not put so much time and energy into it as a mere artist. And what they do does not always reach the public. How many there are who have done great things and not published them to the world!

Have Yogis done greater dramas than Shakespeare?

Drama is not the highest of the arts. Someone has said that drama is greater than any other art and art is greater than life. But it is not quite like that. The mistake of the artist is to believe that artistic production is something that stands by itself and for itself, independent of the rest of the world. Art as understood by these artists is like a mushroom on the wide soil of life, something casual and external, not something intimate to life; it does not reach and touch the deep and abiding realities, it does not become an intrinsic and inseparable part of existence. True art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement. The greatest nations and the most cultured races have always considered art as a part of life and made it subservient to life. Art was like that in Japan in its best moments; it was like that in all the best moments in the history of art. But most artists are like parasites growing on the margin of

life; they do not seem to know that art should be the expression of the Divine in life and through life. In everything, everywhere, in all relations truth must be brought out in its all-embracing rhythm and every movement of life should be an expression of beauty and harmony. Skill is not art, talent is not art. Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. This manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part.

For, from the supramental point of view beauty and harmony are as important as any other expression of the Divine. But they should not be isolated, set up apart from all other relations, taken out from the ensemble; they should be one with the expression of life as a whole. People have the habit of saying, "Oh, it is an artist!" as if an artist should not be a man among other men but must be an extraordinary being belonging to a class by itself, and his art too something extraordinary and apart, not to be confused with the other ordinary things of the world. The maxim, "Art for art's sake", tries to impress and emphasise as a truth the same error. It is the same mistake as when men place in the middle of their drawing-rooms a framed picture that has nothing to do either with the furniture or the walls, but is put there only because it is an "object of art".

True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life. You see something of this intimate wholeness in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt; for there pictures and statues and all objects of art were made and arranged as part of the architectural plan of a building, each detail a portion of the whole. It is like that in Japan, or at least it was so till the other day before the invasion of a utilitarian and practical modernism. A Japanese house is a wonderful artistic whole; always the right thing is there in the right place, nothing wrongly set, nothing too much, nothing too little. Everything is just as it needed to be, and the house itself blends marvellously with the surrounding nature. In India, too, painting and sculpture and architecture

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were one integral beauty, one single movement of adoration of the Divine.

There has been in this sense a great degeneration since then in the world. From the time of Victoria and in France from the Second Empire we have entered into a period of decadence. The habit has grown of hanging up in rooms pictures that have no meaning for the surrounding objects; any picture, any artistic object could now be put anywhere and it would make small difference. Art now is meant to show skill and cleverness and talent, not to embody some integral expression of harmony and beauty in a home.

But latterly there has come about a revolt against this lapse into bourgeois taste. The reaction was so violent that it looked like a complete aberration and art seemed about to sink down into the absurd. Slowly, however, out of the chaos something has emerged, something more rational, more logical, more coherent to which can once more be given the name of art, an art renovated and perhaps, or let us hope so, regenerated.

Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds. A man like Leonardo da Vinci was a Yogi and nothing else. And he was, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest painters, — although his art did not stop at painting alone.

Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been associated with religious feeling and an inner life. But, here too, we have turned it into something independent and self-sufficient,

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a mushroom art, such as is operatic music. Most of the artistic productions we come across are of this kind and at best interesting from the point of view of technique. I do not say that even operatic music cannot be used as a medium of a higher art expression; for whatever the form, it can be made to serve a deeper purpose. All depends on the thing itself, on how it is used, on what is behind it. There is nothing that cannot be used for the Divine purpose — just as anything can pretend to be the Divine and yet be of the mushroom species.

Among the great modern musicians there have been several whose consciousness, when they created, came into touch with a higher consciousness. César Franck played on the organ as one inspired; he had an opening into the psychic life and he was conscious of it and to a great extent expressed it. Beethoven, when he composed the Ninth Symphony, had the vision of an opening into a higher world and of the descent of a higher world into this earthly plane. Wagner had strong and powerful intimations of the occult world; he had the instinct of occultism and the sense of the occult and through it he received his greatest inspirations. But he worked mainly on the vital level and his mind came in constantly to interfere and mechanised his inspiration. His work for the greater part is too mixed, too often obscure and heavy, although powerful. But when he could cross the vital and the mental levels and reach a higher world, some of the glimpses he had were of an exceptional beauty, as in Parsifal, in some parts of Tristan and Iseult and most in its last great Act.

Look again at what the moderns have made of the dance; compare it with what the dance once was. The dance was once one of the highest expressions of the inner life; it was associated with religion and it was an important limb in sacred ceremony, in the celebration of festivals, in the adoration of the Divine. In some countries it reached a very high degree of beauty and an extraordinary perfection. In Japan they kept up the tradition of the dance as a part of the religious life and, because the strict sense of beauty and art is a natural possession of the

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Japanese, they did not allow it to degenerate into something of lesser significance and smaller purpose. It was the same in India. It is true that in our days there have been attempts to resuscitate the ancient Greek and other dances; but the religious sense is missing in all such resurrections and they look more like rhythmic gymnastics than dance.

Today Russian dances are famous, but they are expressions of the vital world and there is even something terribly vital in them. Like all that comes to us from that world, they may be very attractive or very repulsive, but always they stand for themselves and not for the expression of the higher life. The very mysticism of the Russians is of a vital order. As technicians of the dance they are marvellous; but technique is only an instrument. If your instrument is good, so much the better, but so long as it is not surrendered to the Divine, however fine it may be, it is empty of the highest and cannot serve a divine purpose. The difficulty is that most of those who become artists believe that they stand on their own legs and have no need to turn to the Divine. It is a great pity; for in the divine manifestation skill is as useful an element as anything else. Skill is one part of the divine fabric, only it must know how to subordinate itself to greater things.

There is a domain far above the mind which we could call the world of Harmony and, if you can reach there, you will find the root of all harmony that has been manifested in whatever form upon earth. For instance, there is a certain line of music, consisting of a few supreme notes, that was behind the productions of two artists who came one after another — one a concerto of Bach, another a concerto of Beethoven. The two are not alike on paper and differ to the outward ear, but in their essence they are the same. One and the same vibration of consciousness, one wave of significant harmony touched both these artists. Beethoven caught a larger part, but in him it was more mixed with the inventions and interpolations of his mind; Bach received less, but what he seized of it was purer. The vibration was that of the victorious emergence of consciousness,

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consciousness tearing itself out of the womb of unconsciousness in a triumphant uprising and birth.

If by Yoga you are capable of reaching this source of all art, then you are master, if you will, of all the arts. Those that may have gone there before, found it perhaps happier, more pleasant or full of a rapturous ease to remain and enjoy the Beauty and the Delight that are there, not manifesting it, not embodying it upon earth. But this abstention is not all the truth nor the true truth of Yoga; it is rather a deformation, a diminution of the dynamic freedom of Yoga by the more negative spirit of Sannyasa. The will of the Divine is to manifest, not to remain altogether withdrawn in inactivity and an absolute silence; if the Divine Consciousness were really an inaction of unmanifesting bliss, there would never have been any creation.

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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The Ordinary Life and the True Soul

The ordinary life is a round of various desires and greeds. As long as one is preoccupied with them, there can be no lasting progress. A way out of the round must be discovered. Take, as an instance, that commonest preoccupation of ordinary life — the constant thinking by people of what they will eat and when they will eat and whether they are eating enough. To conquer the greed for food an equanimity in the being must be developed such that you are perfectly indifferent towards food. If food is given you, you eat it; if not, it does not worry you in the least; above all, you do not keep thinking about food. And the thinking must not be negative, either. To be absorbed in devising methods and means of abstinence as the *sannyasis* do is to be almost as preoccupied with food as to be absorbed in dreaming of it greedily. Have an attitude of indifference towards it: that is the main thing. Get the idea of food out of your consciousness, do not attach the slightest importance to it.

This will be very easy to do once you get into contact with your psychic being, the true soul deep within you. Then you will feel immediately how very unimportant these things are and that the sole thing that matters is the Divine. To dwell in the psychic is to be lifted above all greed. You will have no hankering, no worry, no feverish desire. And you will feel also that whatever happens, happens for the best. Do not misunderstand me to imply that you must always think that everything is for the best. Everything is not for the best so long as you are in the ordinary consciousness. You may be misled into utterly wrong channels when you are not in the right state of consciousness. But once you are poised in the psychic and have made your self-offering to the Divine, all that happens will happen for the best, for

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everything, however disguised, will be a definite divine response to you.

Indeed the very act of genuine self-giving is its own immediate reward — it brings with it such happiness, such confidence, such security as nothing else can give. But till the self-giving is firmly psychic there will be disturbances, the interval of dark moments between bright ones. It is only the psychic that keeps on progressing in an unbroken line, its movement a continuous ascension. All other movements are broken and discontinuous. And it is not till the psychic is felt as yourself that you can be an individual even; for it is the true self in you. Before the true self is known, you are a public place, not a being. There are so many clashing forces working in you; hence, if you wish to make real progress, know your own being which is in constant union with the Divine. Then alone will transformation be possible. All the other parts of your nature are ignorant: the mind, for instance, often commits the mistake of thinking that every brilliant idea is also a luminous idea. It can with equal vigour trump up arguments for and against God: it has no infallible sense of the truth. The vital is generally impressed by any show of power and is willing to see in it the Godlike. It is only the psychic which has a just discrimination: it is directly aware of the supreme Presence, it infallibly distinguishes between the divine and the undivine. If you have even for a moment contacted it, you will carry with you a conviction about the Divine which nothing will shake.

How, you ask me, are we to know our true being? Ask for it, aspire after it, want it as you want nothing else. Most of you here are influenced by it, but it should be more than an influence, you should be able to feel identified with it. All urge for perfection comes from it, but you are unaware of the source, you are not collaborating with it knowingly, you are not in identification with its light. Do not think I refer to the emotional part of you when I speak of the psychic. Emotion belongs to the higher vital, not to the pure psychic. The psychic is a steady flame that burns in you, soaring towards the Divine and carrying with it a sense

of strength which breaks down all oppositions. When you are identified with it you have the feeling of the divine truth — then you cannot help feeling also that the whole world is ignorantly walking on its head with its feet in the air!

You must learn to unite what you call your individual self with your true psychic individuality. Your present individuality is a very mixed thing, a series of changes which yet preserves a certain continuity, a certain sameness or identity of vibration in the midst of all flux. It is almost like a river which is never the same and yet has a certain definiteness and persistence of its own. Your normal self is merely a shadow of your true individuality which you will realise only when this normal individual which is differently poised at different times, now in the mental, then in the vital, at other times in the physical, gets into contact with the psychic and feels it as its real being. Then you will be one, nothing will shake or disturb you, you will make steady and lasting progress and be above such petty things as greed for food.

Surrender, Self-offering and Consecration

Surrender is the decision taken to hand over the responsibility of your life to the Divine. Without this decision nothing is at all possible; if you do not surrender, the Yoga is entirely out of the question. Everything else comes naturally after it, for the whole process starts with surrender. You can surrender either through knowledge or through devotion. You may have a strong intuition that the Divine alone is the truth and a luminous conviction that without the Divine you cannot manage. Or you may have a spontaneous feeling that this line is the only way of being happy, a strong psychic desire to belong exclusively to the Divine: “I do not belong to myself,” you say, and give up the responsibility of your being to the Truth. Then comes self-offering: “Here I am, a creature of various qualities, good and bad, dark and enlightened. I offer myself as I am to you, take me up with all my ups and downs, conflicting impulses and tendencies — do whatever you like with me.” In the course of your self-offering, you start unifying your being around what has taken the first decision — the central psychic will. All the jarring elements of your nature have to be harmonised, they have to be taken up one after another and unified with the central being. You may offer yourself to the Divine with a spontaneous movement, but it is not possible to give yourself effectively without this unification. The more you are unified, the more you are able to realise self-giving. And once the self-giving is complete, consecration follows: it is the crown of the whole process of realisation, the last step of the gradation, after which there is no more trouble and everything runs smoothly. But you must not forget that you cannot become integrally consecrated at once. You are often deluded into such a belief when, for a day or two, you have a

strong movement of a particular kind. You are led to hope that everything else will automatically follow in its wake; but in fact if you become the least bit self-complacent you retard your own advance. For your being is full of innumerable tendencies at war with one another — almost different personalities, we may say. When one of them gives itself to the Divine, the others come up and refuse their allegiance. “We have not given ourselves,” they cry, and start clamouring for their independence and expression. Then you bid them be quiet and show them the Truth. Patiently you have to go round your whole being, exploring each nook and corner, facing all those anarchic elements in you which are waiting for their psychological moment to come up. And it is only when you have made the entire round of your mental, vital and physical nature, persuaded everything to give itself to the Divine and thus achieved an absolute unified consecration that you put an end to your difficulties. Then indeed yours is a glorious walk towards transformation, for you no longer go from darkness to knowledge but from knowledge to knowledge, light to light, happiness to happiness.... The complete consecration is undoubtedly not an easy matter, and it might take an almost indefinitely long time if you had to do it all by yourself, by your own independent effort. But when the Divine’s Grace is with you it is not exactly like that. With a little push from the Divine now and then, a little push in this direction and in that, the work becomes comparatively quite easy. Of course the length of time depends on each individual, but it can be very much shortened if you make a really firm resolve. Resolution is the one thing required — resolution is the master-key.

Renunciation

There is in books a lot of talk about renunciation — that you must renounce possessions, renounce attachments, renounce desires. But I have come to the conclusion that so long as you have to renounce anything you are not on this path; for, so long as you are not thoroughly disgusted with things as they are, and have to make an effort to reject them, you are not ready for the supramental realisation. If the constructions of the Overmind — the world which it has built and the existing order which it supports — still satisfy you, you cannot hope to partake of that realisation. Only when you find such a world disgusting, unbearable and unacceptable, are you fit for the change of consciousness. That is why I do not give any importance to the idea of renunciation. To renounce means that you are to give up what you value, that you have to discard what you think is worth keeping. What, on the contrary, you must feel is that this world is ugly, stupid, brutal and full of intolerable suffering; and once you feel in this way, all the physical, all the material consciousness which does not want it to be that, will want it to change, crying, “I will have something else — something that is true, beautiful, full of delight and knowledge and consciousness!” All here is floating on a sea of dark unconsciousness. But when you want the Divine with all your will, all your resolution, all your aspiration and intensity, it will surely come. But it is not merely a matter of ameliorating the world. There are people who clamour for change of government, social reform and philanthropic work, believing that they can thereby make the world better. *We* want a new world, a true world, an expression of the Truth-Consciousness. And it will be, it must be — and the sooner the better!

It should not, however, be just a subjective change. The whole physical life must be transformed. The material world

does not want a mere change of consciousness in us. It says in effect: "You retire into bliss, become luminous, have the divine knowledge; but that does not alter me. I still remain the hell I practically am!" The true change of consciousness is one that will change the physical conditions of the world and make it an entirely new creation.

Aspiration in the Physical for the Divine's Love

Here is the flower we have called “Aspiration in the Physical for the Divine's Love.” By the “Physical” I mean the physical consciousness, the most ordinary outward-going consciousness, the normal consciousness of most human beings, which sets such great store by comfort, good food, good clothes, happy relationships, etc., instead of aspiring for the higher things. Aspiration in the physical for the Divine's Love implies that the physical asks for nothing else save that it should feel how the Divine loves it. It realises that all its usual satisfactions are utterly insufficient. But there cannot be a compromise: if the physical wants the Divine's Love it must want that alone and not say, “I shall have the Divine's Love and at the same time keep my other attachments, needs and enjoyments....”

The fundamental seat of aspiration from which it radiates or manifests in one part of the being or another is the psychic centre. When I speak of aspiration in the physical I mean that the very consciousness in you which hankers after material comfort and well-being should of itself, without being compelled by the higher parts of your nature, ask exclusively for the Divine's Love. Usually you have to show it the Light by means of your higher parts; surely this has to be done persistently, otherwise the physical would never learn and it would take Nature's common round of ages before it learns by itself. Indeed the round of Nature is intended to show it all possible sorts of satisfactions and by exhausting them convince it that none of them can really satisfy it and that what it is at bottom seeking is a divine satisfaction. In Yoga we hasten this slow process of Nature and insist on the physical consciousness seeing the truth and learning to recognise and want it. But how to show it the truth? Well, just as

you bring a light into a dark room. Illumine the darkness of your physical consciousness with the intuition and aspiration of your more refined parts and keep on doing so till it realises how futile and unsatisfactory is its hunger for the low ordinary things, and turns spontaneously towards the truth. When it does turn, your whole life will be changed — the experience is unmistakable.

When, as a child, I used to complain to my mother about food or any such small matter she would always tell me to go and do my work or pursue my studies instead of bothering about trifles. She would ask me if I had the complacent idea that I was born for comfort. “You are born to realise the highest Ideal,” she would say and send me packing. She was quite right, though of course her notion of the highest Ideal was rather poor by our standards. We are all born for the highest Ideal: therefore, whenever in our Ashram some petty request for more comfort and material happiness is refused, it is for your own good and to make you fulfil what you are here for. The refusal is actually a favour inasmuch as you are thereby considered worthy to stand before the highest Ideal and be shaped according to it.

Aspiration in Plants

Have you never watched a forest with all its countless trees and plants simply struggling to catch the light — twisting and trying in a hundred possible ways just to be in the sun? That is precisely the feeling of aspiration in the physical — the urge, the movement, the push towards the light. Plants have more of it in their physical being than men. Their whole life is a worship of light. Light is of course the material symbol of the Divine, and the sun represents, under material conditions, the Supreme Consciousness. The plants have felt it quite distinctly in their own simple, blind way. Their aspiration is intense, if you know how to become aware of it. On the plane of Matter they are the most open to my influence — I can transmit a state of consciousness more easily to a flower than to a man: it is very receptive, though it does not know how to formulate its experience to itself because it lacks a mind. But the pure psychic consciousness is instinctive to it. When, therefore, you offer flowers to me their condition is almost always an index to yours. There are persons who never succeed in bringing a fresh flower to me — even if the flower is fresh it becomes limp in their hands. Others, however, always bring fresh flowers and even revitalise drooping ones. If your aspiration is strong your flower-offerings will be fresh. And if you are receptive you will be also very easily able to absorb the message I put in the flowers I give you. When I give them, I give you states of consciousness; the flowers are the mediums and it all depends on your receptivity whether they are effective or not.

Union with the Divine Consciousness and Will

The force which, when absorbed in the Ignorance, takes the form of vital desires is the same which, in its pure form, constitutes the push, the dynamis towards transformation. Consequently, you must beware at the same time of indulging freely in desires, thinking them to be needs which must be satisfied, and of rejecting the vital force as positively evil. What you should do is to throw the doors of your being wide open to the Divine. The moment you conceal something, you step straight into Falsehood. The least suppression on your part pulls you immediately down into unconsciousness. If you want to be fully conscious, be always in front of the Truth — completely open yourself and try your utmost to let it see deep inside you, into every corner of your being. That alone will bring into you light and consciousness and all that is most true. Be absolutely modest — that is to say, know the distance between what you are and what is to be, not allowing the crude physical mentality to think that it knows when it does not, that it can judge when it cannot. Modesty implies the giving up of yourself to the Divine whole-heartedly, asking for help and, by submission, winning the freedom and absence of responsibility which imparts to the mind utter quietness. Not otherwise can you hope to attain the union with the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Will. Of course it depends on the path by which you approach the Divine whether the union with the Consciousness comes first or with the Will. If you go deep within, the former will naturally precede, whereas if you take a standpoint in the universal movement the latter is likely to be realised first; but it is not quite possible to make a cut and dried generalisation because the sadhana is a flexible and fluid thing and also because the Divine Consciousness and Will are

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very closely connected with each other, being two aspects of one single Being. Take note, however, that the merely external similarity of your thought or action does not prove that this union has been achieved. All such proofs are superficial, for the real union means a thorough change, a total reversal of your normal consciousness. You cannot have it in your mind or in your ordinary state of awareness. You must get clean out of that — then and not till then can you be united with the Divine Consciousness. Once the union is really experienced the very idea of proving it by the similarity of your thought and action with mine will make you laugh. People living together in the same house for years or coming in daily intimate contact with one another develop a sort of common mind — they think and act alike. But you cannot claim to be like the Divine by such merely mental contact; you must consent to have your consciousness entirely reversed! The genuine sign of the union is that your consciousness has the same quality, the same way of working as the Divine's and proceeds from the same supramental source of Knowledge. That you sometimes happen to act in the external field as the Divine appears to act may be nothing save coincidence, and to demonstrate the union by such comparisons is to try to prove a very great thing by a very small one! The true test is the direct experience of the Divine Consciousness in whatever you do. It is an unmistakable test, because it changes your being completely. Evidently, you cannot at once be fixed in the Divine Consciousness; but even before it settles in you, you can have now and then the experience of it. The Divine Consciousness will come and go, but while the union lasts you will be as if somebody else! The whole universe will wear a new face and you yourself as well as your perception and vision of things will be metamorphosed. So long as you lack the experience you are inclined to look for proofs: proofs and results are secondary — what the union fundamentally means is that in your consciousness you know more than a human being. It is all to the good if, owing to your acquiring a pure, calm and receptive mind,

you manage to think and act in accordance with my intentions. But you must not mistake a step on the way for the final goal. For the chief difference between the positive union and mental receptivity is that I have to formulate what I want you to carry out and put the formula into your pure and calm mind, whereas in the case of the actual union I need not formulate at all. I just put the necessary truth-consciousness in you and the rest automatically works out, because it is I myself who am then in you.... I dare say it is all rather difficult for you to imagine, the experience being well-nigh indescribable. It is, however, less difficult to imagine the union of the will with the Divine Will, for you can imagine a Will which is effective without struggle and victoriously manifest everywhere. And if all your will tends to unite with it, then there is something approaching a union. That is to say, you begin to lose your separate egoistic will and your being thirsts naturally to fulfil the Divine's behest and, without knowing even what the supreme Will is, wills exactly what the Divine wishes. But this means an unquestioning acceptance of the Higher Guidance. The energy in you which is deformed into vital desire but which is originally the urge towards realisation must unite with the Divine Will, so that all your power of volition mingles with it as a drop of water with the sea. No more then its own weaknesses and failings, but evermore the supreme quality of the Divine Will — Omnipotence!

Endurance—the Vital's Hunger for Praise—Signs of the Converted Vital

Let endurance be your watchword: teach the life-force in you — your vital being — not to complain but to put up with all the conditions necessary for great achievement. The body is a very enduring servant, it bears the stress of circumstance tamely like a beast of burden. It is the vital being that is always grumbling and uneasy. The slavery and torture to which it subjects the physical is almost incalculable. How it twists and deforms the poor body to its own fads and fancies, irrationally demanding that everything should be shaped according to its whimsicality! But the very essence of endurance is that the vital should learn to give up its capricious likes and dislikes and preserve an equanimity in the midst of the most trying conditions. When you are treated roughly by somebody or you lack something which would relieve your discomfort, you must keep up cheerfully instead of letting yourself be disturbed. Let nothing ruffle you the least bit, and whenever the vital tends to air its petty grievances with pompous exaggeration just stop to consider how very happy you are, compared to so many in this world. Reflect for a moment on what the soldiers who fought in the last war had to go through. If you had to bear such hardships you would realise the utter silliness of your dissatisfactions. And yet I do not wish you to court difficulties — what I want is simply that you should learn to endure the little insignificant troubles of your life.

Nothing great is ever accomplished without endurance. If you study the lives of great men you will see how they set themselves like flint against the weaknesses of the vital. Even today, the true meaning of our civilisation is the mastery of the physical through endurance in the vital. The spirit of sport and of adventure and the dauntless facing of odds which is evident

in all fields of life are part of this ideal of endurance. In science itself, progress depends on the countless difficult tests and trials which precede achievement. Surely, with such momentous work as we have in hand in our Ashram, we have not any less need of endurance. What you must do is to give your vital a good beating as soon as it protests; for, when the physical is concerned, there is reason to be considerate and to take precautions, but with the vital the only method is a sound “kicking”. Kick your vital the moment it complains, because there is no other way of getting out of the petty consciousness which attaches so much importance to creature comforts and social amenities instead of asking for the Light and the Truth.

One of the commonest demands of the vital is for praise. It hates to be criticised and treated as if it were of little importance. But it must be always prepared for rebuffs and stand them with absolute calm; nor must it pay attention to compliments, forgetting that each movement of self-satisfaction is an offering at the altar of the lords of falsehood. The beings of the subtle world of the life-force, with which our vital is connected, live and flourish on the worship of their devotees, and that is why they are always inspiring new cults and religions so that their feasts of worship and adulation may never come to an end. So also your own vital being and the vital forces behind it thrive — that is to say, fatten their ignorance — by absorbing the flatteries given by others. But you must remember that the compliments paid by creatures on the same level of ignorance as oneself are really worth nothing, they are just as worthless as the criticisms levelled at one. No matter from what pretentious source they derive, they are futile and empty. Unfortunately, however, the vital craves even for the most rotten food and is so greedy that it will accept praise from even the very embodiments of incompetence. I am reminded of the annual opening of the Arts Exhibition in Paris, when the President of the Republic inspects the pictures, eloquently discovering that one is a landscape and another a portrait, and making platitudinous comments with

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the air of a most intimate soul-searching knowledge of Painting. The painters know very well how inept the remarks are and yet miss no chance of quoting the testimony of the President to their genius. For such indeed is the vital in mankind, ravenously fame-hungry.

What, however, is of genuine worth is the opinion of the Truth. When there is somebody who is in contact with the Divine Truth and can express it, then the opinions given out are no mere compliments or criticisms but what the Divine thinks of you, the value it sets on your qualities, its unerring stamp on your efforts. It must be your desire to hold nothing in esteem except the word of the Truth; and in order thus to raise your standard you must keep Agni, the soul's flame of transformation, burning in you. It is noteworthy how, when Agni flares up, you immediately develop a loathing for the cheap praise which formerly used to gratify you so much, and understand clearly that your love of praise was a low movement of the untransformed nature. Agni makes you see what a vast vista of possible improvement stretches in front of you, by filling you with a keen sense of your present insufficiency. The encomium lavished on you by others so disgusts you that you feel almost bitter towards those whom you would have once considered your friends; whereas all criticism comes as a welcome fuel to your humble aspiration towards the Truth. No longer do you feel depressed or slighted by the hostility of others. For, at least, you are able to ignore it with the greatest ease; at the most, you appreciate it as one more testimony to your present unregenerate state, inciting you to surpass yourself by surrendering to the Divine.

Another remarkable sign of the conversion of your vital, owing to Agni's influence, is that you face your difficulties and obstacles with a smile. You do not sit any more in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting over your mistakes and feeling utterly crestfallen because you are not at the moment quite up to the mark. You simply chase away depression with a smile. A hundred mistakes do not matter to you: with a smile you recognise

that you have erred and with a smile you resolve not to repeat the folly in the future. All depression and gloom is created by the hostile forces who are never so pleased as when throwing on you a melancholy mood. Humility is indeed one thing and depression quite another, the former a divine movement and the latter a very crude expression of the dark forces. Therefore, face your troubles joyously, oppose with invariable cheerfulness the obstacles that beset the road to transformation. The best means of routing the enemy is to laugh in his face! You may grapple and tussle for days and he may still show an undiminished vigour; but just once laugh at him and lo! he takes to his heels. A laugh of self-confidence and of faith in the Divine is the most shattering strength possible — it disrupts the enemy's front, spreads havoc in his ranks and carries you triumphantly onwards.

The converted vital feels also a joy in the process of realisation. All the difficulties implied in that process it accepts with gusto, it never feels happier than when the Truth is shown it and the play of falsehood in its lower nature laid bare. It does not do the Yoga as if carrying a burden on its back but as if it were a very pleasurable occupation. It is willing to endure the utmost with a smile if it is a condition of the transformation. Neither complaining nor grumbling, it endures happily because it is for the sake of the Divine that it does so. It has the unshakable conviction that the victory will be won. Never for an instant does it vacillate in its belief that the mighty work of Change taken up by Sri Aurobindo is going to culminate in success. For that indeed is a fact; there is not a shadow of doubt as to the issue of the work we have in hand. It is no mere experiment but an inevitable manifestation of the Supramental. The converted vital has a prescience of the victory, keeps up a will towards progress which never turns its back, feels full of the energy which is born of its certitude about the triumph of the Divine whom it is aware of always in itself as doing whatsoever is necessary and infusing in it the unfaltering power to resist and finally conquer its enemies. Why should it despair or complain?

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The transformation is going to be: nothing will ever stop it, nothing will frustrate the decree of the Omnipotent. Cast away, therefore, all diffidence and weakness, and resolve to endure bravely awhile before the great day arrives when the long battle turns into an everlasting victory.

Victory over Falsehood

The lords of Falsehood hold, at present, almost complete sway over poor humanity. Not only the lower life-energy, the lower vital being, but also the whole mind of man accepts them. Countless are the ways in which they are worshipped, for they are most subtle in their cunning and seek their ends in variously seductive disguises. The result is that men cling to their falsehood as if it were a treasure, cherishing it more than even the most beautiful things of life. Apprehensive of its safety, they take care to bury it deep down in themselves; but unless they take it out and surrender it to the Divine they will never find true happiness.

Indeed the very act of bringing it out and showing it to the Light would be in itself a momentous conversion and pave the way to the final victory. For the laying bare of each falsehood is in itself a victory — each acknowledgment of error is the demolition of one of the lords of Darkness. It may be an acknowledgment to oneself, provided it is absolutely honest and is no subtle regret apt to be forgotten the next moment and without the strength to make an unbreakable resolution not to repeat the mistake. Or it may be the acknowledgment to the Divine embodied in the Guru. As a result of direct personal confession to the Guru, your resolution remains no longer your own, because, if you are sincere, the Divine's fiat goes forth in your favour. To give you an idea of what this means I shall relate an experience of mine when I first met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. I was in deep concentration, seeing things in the Supermind, things that were to be but which were somehow not manifesting. I told Sri Aurobindo what I had seen and asked him if they would manifest. He simply said, "Yes." And immediately I saw that the Supramental had touched the earth and was beginning to be realised! This was the first time I had witnessed the power to make real what is true: it is the very same power

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that will bring about the realisation in you of the truth when you come in all sincerity, saying, “This falsehood I want to get rid of”, and the answer which you get is “Yes.”

Difficulties in Yoga

The nature of your difficulty indicates the nature of the victory you will gain, the victory you will exemplify in Yoga. Thus, if there is persistent selfishness, it points to a realisation of universality as your most prominent achievement in the future. And, when selfishness is there, you have also the power to reverse this very difficulty into its opposite, a victory of utter wideness.

When you have something to realise, you will have in you just the characteristic which is the contradiction of that something. Face to face with the defect, the difficulty, you say, “Oh, I am like that! How awful it is!” But you ought to see the truth of the situation. Say to yourself, “My difficulty shows me clearly what I have ultimately to represent. To reach the absolute negation of it, the quality at the other pole — this is my mission.”

Even in ordinary life, we have sometimes the experience of contraries. He who is very timid and has no courage in front of circumstances proves capable of bearing the most!

To one who has the aspiration for the Divine, the difficulty which is always before him is the door by which he will attain God in his own individual manner: it is his particular path towards the Divine Realisation.

There is also the fact that if somebody has a hundred difficulties it means he will have a tremendous realisation — provided, of course, there are in him patience and endurance and he keeps the aspiring flame of Agni burning against those defects.

And remember: the Grace of the Divine is generally proportioned to your difficulties.

Vital Conversion – Rebirth and Personal Survival

It is very important that the vital should agree to change: it must learn to accept conversion. The vital is not in itself anything to be decried: in fact, all energy, dynamism and push comes from it — without it you may be calm and wise and detached, but you will be absolutely immobile and uncreative. The body would be inert, just like a stone, without the force infused into it by the vital. If the vital is left out, you would be able to realise nothing. But like a spirited horse it is liable to be refractory and, therefore, requires good control. You have to keep your reins tight and your whip ready in order to keep the powerful beast in check. Of course, once the vital has consented to be transformed there is no need either of the tight reins or the ready whip: you proceed smoothly towards the goal, leaping lightly over each obstacle in the way. Otherwise, the vital will either stumble over the barriers or fight shy of jumping them. It is no use thinking that all would have been well if there had been no hurdles at all: they are a part of the game and if they are not faced and jumped in this life on earth you will have to surmount a hundred times greater ones on other planes and in other lives. The best thing is to make up your mind once for all and train your vital to run the race here while you are in the body and, if possible, win it. You are sure to win provided your physical mind reforms itself and helps the vital to change, instead of playing the role of a robber who holds down his victim while his accomplice makes a haul of the victim's property.

The condition of your being after death depends very much on whether the vital has been converted here or not. If you are only a medley of unorganised impulses, then at death, when the consciousness withdraws into the background, the different

personalities in you fall apart, rushing hither and thither to seek their own suitable environments. One part may enter into another person who has an affinity for it, another may even enter an animal, while that which has been alive to the divine Presence may remain attached to the central psychic being. But if you are fully organised and converted into a single individual, bent on reaching the goal of evolution, then you will be conscious after death and preserve a continuity.

As to rebirth, it must be confessed that no rule holds good for all cases. Some people are reborn almost immediately — it most often happens with parents that a part of them gets assimilated into their children if the latter are very much attached to them. Some people, however, take centuries and even thousands of years to be reincarnated. They wait for the necessary conditions to mature which will provide them with a suitable *milieu*. If one is yogically conscious he can actually prepare the body of his next birth. Before the body is born he shapes and moulds it, so that it is he who is the true maker of it while the parents of the new child are only the adventitious, purely physical agents.

I must here remark in passing that there is a common misconception about rebirth. People believe that it is they who are reincarnated, yet this is a palpable error, though it is true that parts of their being are amalgamated with others and so act through new bodies. Their whole being is not reborn, because of the simple fact that what they evidently mean by their “self” is not a real individualised entity but their exterior personality, the personality composed of the outward name and form. Hence it is wrong to say that A is reborn as B: A is a personality organically distinct from B and cannot be said to have reincarnated as B. You would be right only if you said that the same line of consciousness uses both A and B as the instruments of its manifestation. For, what does remain constant is the psychic being which is not the outward personality at all, but something deep within, something which is not the exterior name and form.

You want to know if all men retain their identities after

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the dissolution of their bodies. Well, it depends. The ordinary mass of men are so closely identified with their bodies that nothing of them survives when the physical disintegrates. Not that absolutely nothing survives — the vital and mental stuff always remains but it is not identical with the physical personality. What survives has not the clear impress of the exterior personality because the latter was content to remain a jumble of impulses and desires, a temporary organic unity constituted by the cohesion and coordination of bodily functions, and when these functions cease their pseudo-unity also naturally comes to an end. Only if there has been a mental discipline imposed on the different parts and they have been made to subserve a common mental ideal, can there be some sort of genuine individuality which retains the memory of its earthly life and so survives consciously. The artist, the philosopher and other developed persons who have organised, individualised and to a certain extent converted their vital being can be said to survive, because they have brought into their exterior consciousness some shadow of the psychic entity which is immortal by its very nature and whose aim is to progressively build up the being around the central Divine Will.

Resurrection

Resurrection means, for us, the falling off of the old consciousness; but it is not only a rebirth, a sudden change which completely breaks with the past. There is a certain continuity in it between dying to your old self, your low exterior nature and starting quite anew. In the experience of resurrection the movement of discarding the old being is closely connected with that of the rising up from it of the new consciousness and the new strength, so that from what is thrown off the best can unite in a new creation with what has succeeded. The true significance of resurrection is that the Divine Consciousness awakes from the unconsciousness into which it has gone down and lost itself, the Divine Consciousness becomes once more aware of itself in spite of its descent into the world of death, night and obscurity. That world of obscurity is darker even than our physical night: if you came up after plunging into it you would actually find the most impenetrable night clear, just as returning from the true Light of the Divine Consciousness, the Supramental Light without obscurity, you would find the physical sun black. But even in the depths of that supreme darkness the supreme Light lies hidden. Let that Light and that Consciousness awaken in you, let there be the great Resurrection.

Reincarnation – Memory of Past Lives

To understand rightly the problem of what is popularly called reincarnation, you must perceive that there are two factors in it which require consideration. First, there is the line of divine consciousness which seeks to manifest from above and upholds a certain series of formations, peculiar to itself, in the universe which is its field of manifestation. Secondly, there is the psychic consciousness which climbs up from below, the seed of the Divine developing through time till it meets the Force from above and takes the impress of the supramental Truth. This psychic consciousness is the inner being of a man, the material from which his true soul or *jiva* can be fashioned when, in response to its aspiration, the Supramental descends to give it a consistent personality. The exterior being of man is a perishable formation out of the stuff of universal Nature — mental, vital, physical — and is due to the complex interplay of all kinds of forces. The psychic absorbs the essence, as it were, of the experiences of the various formations behind which it stands; but not being in constant contact with them it does not retain the memory of the lives in their totality to which it supplies the background. Hence by merely contacting the psychic one cannot have the recollection of all those past lives: what commonly goes by the name of such recollection is, mostly, either deliberate imposture or a fabrication out of a few spasmodic hints received from within. Many people claim to remember their animal lives as well: they say that they were such and such a monkey living in this or that part of the globe. But if anything is certain, it is that the monkey has no contact whatever with the psychic consciousness and so transmits not one jot of his experiences to it. The impressions of his exterior monkey-nature vanish with

the crumbling of his animal body: to pretend to a knowledge of them is to betray the grossest ignorance of the actual facts of the problem under consideration. Even with regard to human lives, it is only when the psychic has come to the fore that it carries and preserves definite memories, but certainly not of all the details of life unless it is constantly in front and one with the exterior being. For, as a rule, the physical mind and the physical vital dissolve with the death of the organism: they disintegrate and return to the universal Nature and nothing remains of their experiences. Not until they have become united with the psychic, so that there are not two halves but a single consciousness, the whole nature unified round the central Divine Will and this centralised being is connected up with the divine line of consciousness which is above — not until this happens can one receive the knowledge belonging to that consciousness and become aware of the entire series of forms and lives which were upheld by it as its own successive means of gradual self-expression. Before this is done, it is meaningless to speak of *one's* past births and their various incidents. This precious *oneself* is just the present impermanent exterior nature which has absolutely nothing to do with the several other formations behind which, as behind the present one, the true being stands. Only the supramental consciousness holds these births as if strung on one single thread and that alone can give the real knowledge of them all.

Psychic Presence and Psychic Being— Real Origin of Race Superiority

With regard to the evolution upwards, it is more correct to speak of the psychic presence than the psychic being. For it is the psychic presence which little by little becomes the psychic being. In each evolving form there is this presence, but it is not individualised. It is something which is capable of growth and follows the movement of the evolution. It is not a descent of the involution from above. It is formed progressively round the spark of Divine Consciousness which is meant to be the centre of a growing being which becomes the psychic being when it is at last individualised. It is this spark that is permanent and gathers round itself all sorts of elements for the formation of that individuality; the true psychic being is formed only when the psychic personality is fully grown, fully built up, round the eternal divine spark; it attains its culmination, its total fulfilment if and when it unites with a being or personality from above.

Below the human level there is, ordinarily, hardly any individual formation — there is only this presence, more or less. But when, by the growth of the body round the spark of Divine Consciousness, humanity began upon the earth, certain human organisms became in the course of this progressive growth sufficiently perfected, and by their opening and receptivity allowed a junction with certain beings descending from above. This gave rise to a kind of divine humanity, what may be called a race of the élite. If only they had remained by themselves, these people would have continued as a race unique and superhuman. Indeed many races have made claims to be that: the Aryan, the Semitic and the Japanese have all in turn considered themselves the chosen race. But in fact there has been a general levelling of humanity, a lot of intermixture. For there arose the necessity

of prolongation of the superior race, which drove it to intermix with the rest of humanity — with animal humanity, that is to say. Thus its value was degraded and led to that great Fall which is spoken of in the world's scriptures, the coming out of Paradise, the end of the Golden Age. Indeed it was a loss from the point of view of consciousness, but not from that of material strength, since it was a tremendous gain to ordinary humanity. There were, certainly, some beings who had a very strong will not to mix, who resented losing their superiority; and it is just this that is the real origin of race-pride, race-exclusiveness, and a special caste distinction like that cherished by the Brahmins in India. But at present it cannot be said that there is any portion of mankind which is purely animal: all the races have been touched by the descent from above, and owing to the extensive intermixture the result of the Involution was more widely spread.

Of course one cannot say that every man has got a psychic being, just as one cannot refuse to grant it to every animal. Many animals that have lived near man have some beginnings of it, while so often one comes across people who do not seem to be anything else than brutes. Here, too, there has been a good deal of levelling. But on the whole, the psychic in the true sense starts at the human stage: that is also why the Catholic religion declares that only man has a soul. In man alone there is the possibility of the psychic being growing to its full stature even so far as to be able in the end to join and unite with a descending being, a godhead from above.

Faith

The perception of the exterior consciousness may deny the perception of the psychic. But the psychic has the true knowledge, an intuitive instinctive knowledge. It says, "I know; I cannot give reasons, but I know." For its knowledge is not mental, based on experience or proved true. It does not believe after proofs are given: faith is the movement of the soul whose knowledge is spontaneous and direct. Even if the whole world denies and brings forward a thousand proofs to the contrary, still it knows by an inner knowledge, a direct perception that can stand against everything, a perception by identity. The knowledge of the psychic is something which is concrete and tangible, a solid mass. You can also bring it into your mental, your vital and your physical; and then you have an integral faith — a faith which can really move mountains. But nothing in the being must come and say, "It is not like that", or ask for a test. By the least half-belief you spoil matters. How can the Supreme manifest if faith is not integral and immovable? Faith in itself is always unshakable — that is its very nature, for otherwise it is not faith at all. But it may happen that the mind or the vital or the physical does not follow the psychic movement. A man can come to a Yogi and have a sudden faith that this person will lead him to his goal. He does not know whether the person has knowledge or not. He feels a psychic shock and knows that he has met his master. He does not believe after long mental consideration or seeing many miracles. And this is the only kind of faith worthwhile. You will always miss your destiny if you start arguing. Some people sit down and consider whether the psychic impulse is reasonable or not.

It is not really by what is called blind faith that people are misled. They often say, "Oh, I have believed in this or that man and he has betrayed me!" But in fact the fault lies not with the

man but with the believer: it is some weakness in himself. If he had kept his faith intact he would have changed the man: it is because he did not remain in the same faith-consciousness that he found himself betrayed and did not make the man what he wanted him to be. If he had had integral faith, he would have obliged the man to change. It is always by faith that miracles happen. A person goes to another and has a contact with the Divine Presence; if he can keep this contact pure and sustained, it will oblige the Divine Consciousness to manifest in the most material. But all depends on your own standard and your own sincerity; and the more you are psychically ready the more you are led to the right source, the right master. The psychic and its faith are always sincere, but if in your exterior being there is insincerity and if you are seeking not spiritual life but personal powers, that can mislead you. It is that and not your faith that misleads you. Pure in itself, faith can get mixed up in the being with low movements and it is then that you are misled.

Power of Right Attitude

Is it really the best that always happens?... It is clear that all that has happened had to happen: it could not be otherwise — by the universal determinism it had to happen. But we can say so only after it has happened, not before. For the problem of the very best that can happen is an individual problem, whether the individual be a nation or a single human being; and all depends upon the personal attitude. If, in the presence of circumstances that are about to take place, you can take the highest attitude possible — that is, if you put your consciousness in contact with the highest consciousness within reach, you can be absolutely sure that in that case it is the best that can happen to you. But as soon as you fall from this consciousness into a lower state, then it is evidently not the best that can happen, for the simple reason that you are not in your very best consciousness. I even go so far as to affirm that in the zone of immediate influence of each one, the right attitude not only has the power to turn every circumstance to advantage but can change the very circumstance itself. For instance, when a man comes to kill you, if you remain in the ordinary consciousness and get frightened out of your wits, he will most probably succeed in doing what he came for; if you rise a little higher and though full of fear call for the divine help, he may just miss you, doing you a slight injury; if, however, you have the right attitude and the full consciousness of the divine presence everywhere around you, he will not be able to lift even a finger against you.

This truth is just the key to the whole problem of transformation. Always keep in touch with the divine presence, try to bring it down — and the very best will always take place. Of course the world will not change at once, but it will go forward as rapidly as it possibly can. Do not forget that this is so only if you keep on the straight road of Yoga, and not if you deviate

and lose your way and wander about capriciously or helplessly as though in a virgin forest.

If each of you did your utmost, then there would be the right collaboration and the result would be so much the quicker. I have had innumerable examples of the power of right attitude. I have seen crowds saved from catastrophes by one single person keeping the right attitude. But it must be an attitude that does not remain somewhere very high and leaves the body to its usual reactions. If you remain high up like that, saying, "Let God's will be done", you may get killed all the same. For your body may be quite undivine, shivering with fear: the thing is to hold the true consciousness in the body itself and not have the least fear and be full of the divine peace. Then indeed there is no danger. Not only can attacks of men be warded off, but beasts also and even the elements can be affected. I can give you a little example. You remember the night of the great cyclone, when there was a tremendous noise and splash of rain all about the place. I thought I would go to Sri Aurobindo's room and help him shut the windows. I just opened his door and found him sitting quietly at his desk, writing. There was such a solid peace in the room that nobody would have dreamed that a cyclone was raging outside. All the windows were wide open, not a drop of rain was coming inside.

Power of Imagination

The imagination is really the power of mental formation. When this power is put at the service of the Divine, it is not only formative but also creative. There is, however, no such thing as an unreal formation, because every image is a reality on the mental plane. The plot of a novel, for instance, is all there on the mental plane existing independently of the physical. Each of us is a novelist to a certain extent and possesses the capacity to make forms on that plane; and, in fact, a good deal of our life embodies the products of our imagination. Every time you indulge your imagination in an unhealthy way, giving a form to your fears and anticipating accidents and misfortunes, you are undermining your own future. On the other hand, the more optimistic your imagination, the greater the chance of your realising your aim. Monsieur Coué got hold of this potent truth and cured hundreds of people by simply teaching them to imagine themselves out of misery. He once related the case of a lady whose hair was falling off. She began to suggest to herself that she was improving every day and that her hair was surely growing. By constantly imagining it her hair really began to grow and even reached an enviable length owing to still further auto-suggestion. The power of mental formation is most useful in Yoga also; when the mind is put in communication with the Divine Will, the supramental Truth begins to descend through the layers intervening between the mind and the highest Light and if, on reaching the mind, it finds there the power of making forms it easily becomes embodied and stays as a creative force in you. Therefore I say to you never be dejected and disappointed but let your imagination be always hopeful and joyously plastic to the stress of the higher Truth, so that the latter may find you full of the necessary formations to hold its creative light.

The imagination is like a knife which may be used for good

or evil purposes. If you always dwell in the idea and feeling that you are going to be transformed, then you will help the process of the Yoga. If, on the contrary, you give in to dejection and bewail that you are not fit or that you are incapable of realisation, you poison your own being. It is just on account of this very important truth that I am so tirelessly insistent in telling you to let anything happen but, for heavens sake, not to get depressed. Live rather in the constant hope and conviction that what we are doing will prove a success. In other words, let your imagination be moulded by your faith in Sri Aurobindo; for, is not such faith the very hope and conviction that the will of Sri Aurobindo is bound to be done, that his work of transformation cannot but end in a supreme victory and that what he calls the supramental world will be brought down on earth and realised by us here and now?

Selfless Admiration

People are so unwilling to recognise anything that expresses the Divine that they are ever on the alert to find fault, discover apparent defects and so reduce what is high to their own level. They are simply furious at being surpassed and when they do succeed in finding superficial “shortcomings” they are greatly pleased. But they forget that if they confront even the Divine, when its presence is on the earth, with their crude physical mind they are bound to meet only what is crude. They cannot hope to see what they are themselves incapable of seeing or unwilling to see. They are sure to misjudge the Divine if they consider the surface-aspect of its actions, for they will never understand that what seems similar to human activity is yet altogether dissimilar and proceeds from a source which is non-human.

The Divine, manifesting itself for the work on earth, appears to act as men do but really does not. It is not possible to evaluate it by such standards of the obvious and the apparent. But men are utterly in love with their own inferiority and cannot bear to submit to or admit a higher reality. This desire to find fault, this malicious passion to criticise and doubt what something in oneself tells one is a higher reality is the very stamp of humanity — it marks out the merely human. Wherever, on the other hand, there is a spontaneous admiration for the true, the beautiful, the noble, there is something divine expressed. You should know for certain that it is the psychic being, the soul in you with which your physical consciousness comes in contact when your heart leaps out to worship and admire what you feel to be of a divine origin.

The moment you are in front of what you feel to be such, you should be moved to tears of joy. It is the mean creature who stops to reflect: “Yes, it is something great but it would be worth admiring if it fell to my lot, if I were the happy possessor

of this quality, the instrument of this superior manifestation.” Why should you bother about your ego when the main concern is that the Divine should reveal itself wherever it wants and in whatever manner it chooses? You should feel fulfilled when it is thus expressed, you should be able to burst the narrow bonds of your miserable personality, and soar up in unselfish joy. This joy is the true sign that your soul has awakened and has sensed the truth. It is only then that you can open to the influence of the descending truth and be shaped by it. I remember occasions when I used to be moved to tears on seeing even children, even babies do something that was most divinely beautiful and simple. Feel that joy and you will be able to profit by the Divine’s presence in your midst.

Stepping Back

Most of you live on the surface of your being, exposed to the touch of external influences. You live almost projected, as it were, outside your own body, and when you meet some unpleasant being similarly projected you get upset. The whole trouble arises out of your not being accustomed to stepping back. You must always step back into yourself — learn to go deep within — step back and you will be safe. Do not lend yourself to the superficial forces which move in the outside world. Even if you are in a hurry to do something, step back for a while and you will discover to your surprise how much sooner and with what greater success your work can be done. If someone is angry with you, do not be caught in his vibrations but simply step back and his anger, finding no support or response, will vanish. Always keep your peace, resist all temptation to lose it. Never decide anything without stepping back, never speak a word without stepping back, never throw yourself into action without stepping back. All that belongs to the ordinary world is impermanent and fugitive, so there is nothing in it worth getting upset about. What is lasting, eternal, immortal and infinite — that indeed is worth having, worth conquering, worth possessing. It is Divine Light, Divine Love, Divine Life — it is also Supreme Peace, Perfect Joy and All-Mastery upon earth with the Complete Manifestation as the crowning. When you get the sense of the relativity of things, then whatever happens you can step back and look; you can remain quiet and call on the Divine Force and wait for an answer. Then you will know exactly what to do. Remember, therefore, that you cannot receive the answer before you are very peaceful. Practise that inner peace, make at least a small beginning and go on in your practice until it becomes a habit with you.

Knowledge of the Scientist and the Yogi

The climax of the ordinary consciousness is Science. For Science, what is upon the earth is true, simply because it is there. What it calls Nature is for it the final reality, and its aim is to build up a theory to explain the workings of it. So it climbs as high as the physical mind can go and tries to find out the causes of what it assumes to be the true, the real world. But in fact it adapts “causes” to “effects”, for it has already taken that which is for the true, the real, and seeks only to explain it mentally. For the yogic consciousness, however, this world is not the final reality. Rising above the mind into the Overmind and then into the Supermind, it enters the divine world of first truths, and looking down from there sees what has happened to those truths here. How distorted they have become, how completely falsified! So the so-called world of fact is for the Yogi a falsehood and not at all the only true reality. It is not what it ought to be, it is almost the very opposite; whereas for the scientist it is absolutely fundamental.

Our aim is to change things. The scientist says that whatever is, is natural and cannot be changed at heart. But, really speaking, the laws of which he usually speaks are of his own mental making; and because he accepts Nature as it is as the very basis, things do not and cannot change for him in any complete sense. But, according to us, all this can be changed, because we know that there is something above, a divine truth seeking manifestation. There are no fixed laws here; even Science in its undogmatic moments recognises that the laws are mere mental constructions. There are only cases, and if the mind could apply itself to all the circumstances it would find that no two cases are similar. Laws are for the mind’s convenience, but the process of

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the supramental manifestation is different, we may even say it is the reverse of the mind. In the supramental realisation, each thing will carry in itself a truth which will manifest at each instant without being bound by what has been or what will follow. That elaborate linking of the past with the present, which gives things in Nature such an air of unchangeable determinism is altogether the mind's way of conceiving, and is no proof that all that exists is inevitable and cannot be otherwise.

The knowledge possessed by the Yogi is also an answer to the terrible theory that all that takes place is God's direct working. For once you rise to the Supermind you immediately perceive that the world is false and distorted. The supramental truth has not at all found manifestation. How then can the world be a genuine expression of the Divine? Only when the Supermind is established and rules here, then alone the Supreme Will may be said to have authentically manifested. At the same time, we must steer clear of the dangerous exaggeration of the sense of the falsehood of the world, which comes to those who have risen to the higher consciousness. What happened with Shankara and others like him was that they had a glimpse of the true consciousness, which threw the falsehood of this world into such sharp contrast that they declared the universe to be not only false but also a really non-existent illusion which should be entirely abandoned. We, on the other hand, see its falsehood, but realise also that it has to be replaced and not abandoned as an illusion. Only, the truth has got mistranslated, something has stepped in to pervert the divine reality, but the world is in fact meant to express it. And to express it is indeed our Yoga.

Chance

What do we understand by the term “chance”? Chance can only be the opposite of order and harmony. There is only one true harmony and that is the supramental — the reign of Truth, the expression of the Divine Law. In the Supermind, therefore, chance has no place. But in the lower Nature the supreme Truth is obscured: hence there is an absence of that divine unity of purpose and action which alone can constitute order. Lacking this unity, the domain of lower Nature is governed by what we may call chance — that is to say, it is a field in which various conflicting forces intermix, having no single definite aim. Whatever arises out of such a rushing together of forces is a result of confusion, dissonance and falsehood — a product of chance. Chance is not merely a conception to cover our ignorance of the causes at work; it is a description of the uncertain *melée* of the lower Nature which lacks the calm one-pointedness of the divine Truth. The world has forgotten its divine origin and become an arena of egoistic energies; but it is still possible for it to open to the Truth, call it down by its aspiration and bring about a change in the whirl of chance. What men regard as a mechanical sequence of events, owing to their own mental associations, experiences and generalisations, is really manipulated by subtle agencies each of which tries to get its own will done. The world has got so subjected to these undivine agencies that the victory of the Truth cannot be won except by fighting for it. It has no right to it: it has to gain it by disowning the falsehood and the perversion, an important part of which is the facile notion that, since all things owe their final origin to the Divine, all their immediate activities also proceed directly from it. The fact is that here in the lower Nature the Divine is veiled by a cosmic Ignorance and what takes place does not proceed directly from the divine knowledge. That everything is equally the will

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of God is a very convenient suggestion of the hostile influences which would have the creation stick as tightly as possible to the disorder and ugliness to which it has been reduced. So what is to be done, you ask? Well, call down the Light, open yourselves to the power of Transformation. Innumerable times the divine peace has been given to you and as often you have lost it—because something in you refuses to surrender its petty egoistic routine. If you are not always vigilant, your nature will return to its old unregenerate habits even after it has been filled with the descending Truth. It is the struggle between the old and the new that forms the crux of the Yoga; but if you are bent on being faithful to the supreme Law and Order revealed to you, the parts of your being belonging to the domain of chance will, however slowly, be converted and divinised.

Different Kinds of Space and Time – Fearlessness on the Vital Plane

Space and time do not begin and end with the mental consciousness: even the Overmind has them. They are the forms of all cosmic existence: only, they vary on each level. Each world has its own space and time.

Thus the mental space and time do not tally with what we observe here in the material universe. In the mind-world we can move forward and backward at our own will and pleasure. The moment you think of a person you are with him; and no matter how near you may be to somebody, you can still be far away if your thoughts are occupied with someone else. The movement is immediate, so very free are the spatio-temporal conditions there. In the vital world, however, you have to use your will: there, too, distance is less rigid, but the movement is not immediate: the will has to be exercised.

The knowledge of different space-times can be of great practical value in Yoga. For, so many blunders are due to the inability to act in the right way when you are in your vital and mental bodies. In dreams, for instance, you must remember that you are in the space and time of the vital world and not try to act as if you were still in your physical body. If you have the necessary knowledge of the state of things there, you can deal much more effectively with those vital beings who terrify you and give you such unpleasant nightmares. One of the characteristics of activity in the vital space and time is that these beings are able to assume huge shapes at will and create the vibration of fear in you which is their most powerful means of invading and possessing you. You must bear in mind their power of terrifying illusion, and cast out all fear. Once you face them boldly, unflinchingly, and look them straight in the eyes, they lose three-quarters of

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their power. And if you call upon us for help, then even the last quarter is gone and they either take to their heels or dissolve. A friend of mine who used to go out in his vital body once complained that he was always being confronted with a gigantic tiger which made the night very wretched for him. I told him to banish all fear and walk straight up to the beast and stare it in the face, calling of course for assistance if necessary. He did so and lo! the tiger suddenly dwindled into an insignificant cat!

You have no idea of the almost magical effect of staring fearlessly into the eyes of a vital being. Even on earth, if you deal in this way with all those incarnations of the vital powers which we ordinarily call animals, you are assured of easy mastery. A physical tiger will also flee from you, if without the least tremor you look him straight in the eyes. A snake will never be able to bite you if you manage to rivet its gaze to yours without feeling the slightest dread. Merely staring at it with shaking knees will not help. There must be no disturbance in you: you must be calm and collected when you catch its gaze as it keeps swaying its head in order to fascinate you into abject fear. Animals are aware of a light in the human eyes which they are unable to bear if it is properly directed towards them. Man's look carries a power which nullifies them, provided it is steady and unafraid.

So, to sum up, remember two things: never, never be afraid, and in all circumstances call for the right help to make your strength a hundredfold stronger.

Knowledge by Unity with the Divine – The Divine Will in the World

Consciousness is the faculty of becoming aware of anything whatsoever through identification with it. But the divine consciousness is not only aware but knows and effects. For, mere awareness is not knowledge. To become aware of a vibration, for instance, does not mean that you know everything about it. Only when the consciousness participates in the divine consciousness does it get full knowledge by identification with the object. Ordinarily, identification leads to ignorance rather than knowledge, for the consciousness is lost in what it becomes and is unable to envisage proper causes, concomitants and consequences. Thus you identify yourself with a movement of anger and your whole being becomes one angry vibration, blind and precipitate, oblivious of everything else. It is only when you stand back, remain detached in the midst of the passionate turmoil that you are able to see the process with a knowing eye. So knowledge in the ordinary state of being is to be obtained rather by stepping back from a phenomenon, to watch it without becoming identified with it. But the divine consciousness identifies itself with its object and knows it thoroughly, because it always becomes one with the essential truth or law inherent in each fact. And it not only knows, but, by knowing, brings about what it wants. To be conscious is for it to be effective — each of its movements being a flash of omnipotence which, besides illumining, blazes its way ultimately to the goal dictated by its truth-nature.

Your ordinary consciousness is very much mixed up with unconsciousness — it fumbles, strains and is thwarted, while by unity with the Supreme you share the Supreme Nature and get the full knowledge whenever you turn to observe any object and identify yourself with it. Of course, this does not necessarily

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amount to embracing all the contents of the divine consciousness. Your movements become true, but you do not possess all the manifold riches of the Divine's activity. Still, within your sphere, you are able to see correctly and according to the truth of things — which is certainly more than what is called in yogic parlance knowledge by identity. For, the kind of identification taught by many disciplines extends your limits of perception without piercing to the innermost heart of an object: it sees from within it, as it were, but only its phenomenal aspect. For example, if you identify yourself with a tree, you become aware in the way in which a tree is aware of itself, yet you do not come to know everything about a tree for the simple reason that it is itself not possessed of such knowledge. You do share the tree's inner feeling, but you certainly do not understand the truth it stands for, any more than by being conscious of your own natural self you possess at once the divine reality which you secretly are. Whereas if you are one with the divine consciousness, you know — over and above how the tree feels — what the truth behind it is, in short, you know everything, because the divine consciousness knows everything.

Indeed, there are many means of attaining this unity. It may be done through aspiration, or surrender, or some other method. Each followed with persistence and sincerity leads to it. Aspiration is the dynamic push of your whole nature behind the resolution to reach the Divine. Surrender, on the other hand, may be defined as the giving up of the limits of your ego. To surrender to the Divine is to renounce your narrow limits and let yourself be invaded by it and made a centre for its play. But you must bear in mind that the universal consciousness so beloved of Yogis is not the Divine: you can break your limits horizontally if you like, but you will be quite mistaken if you take the sense of wideness and cosmic multiplicity to be the Divine. The universal movement is after all a mixture of falsehood and truth, so that to stop there is to be imperfect; for, you may very well share the cosmic consciousness without ever attaining the transcendent

Truth. On the other hand, to go to the Divine is also to attain the universal realisation and yet remain free of falsehood.

The real bar to self-surrender, whether to the Universal or to the Transcendent, is the individual's love of his own limitations. It is a natural love, since in the very formation of the individual being there is a tendency to concentrate on limits. Without that, there would be no sense of separateness — all would be mixed, as happens quite often in the mental and vital movements of consciousness. It is the body especially which preserves separative individuality by not being so fluid. But once this separateness is established, there creeps in the fear of losing it — a healthy instinct in many respects, but misapplied with regard to the Divine. For, in the Divine you do not really lose your individuality: you only give up your egoism and become the true individual, the divine personality which is not temporary like the construction of the physical consciousness which is usually taken for your *self*. One touch of the divine consciousness and you see immediately that there is no loss in it. On the contrary, you acquire a true individual permanence which can survive a hundred deaths of the body and all the vicissitudes of the vital-mental evolution. Without this transfiguring touch, you always go about in fear; with it, you gradually develop the power to make even your physical being plastic without losing its individuality. Even now, it is not entirely rigid, it is able to feel the conscious movements of others by a sort of sympathy which translates itself into nervous reactions to their joys and sufferings: it is also able to express your inner movements — it is well known that the face is an index and mirror to the mind. But only the divine consciousness can make the body responsive enough to reflect all the movements of the supramental immortality and be an expression of the true soul and, by being divinised, reach the acme of a supreme individuality which can even physically rise superior to the necessity of death and dissolution.

In conclusion, I should like to draw your attention to one point, for it very frequently obstructs true union. It is a great

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error to suppose that the Divine Will is always acting openly in the world. All that happens is not, in fact, divine: the Supreme Will is distorted in the manifestation owing to the combination of lower forces which translate it. They are the medium which falsifies its impetus and gives it an undivine result. If all that happened were indeed the flawless translation of it, how could you account for the distortions of the world?... Not that the Divine Will could not have caused the cosmic Ignorance. It is omnipotent and all possibilities are inherent in it: it can work out anything of which it sees the secret necessity in its original vision. And the first cause of the world is, of course, the Divine, though we must take care not to adjudge this fact mentally according to our petty ethical values. But once the conditions of the cosmos were laid down and the involution into nescience accepted as the basis of a progressive manifestation of the Divine out of all that seemed its very opposite, there took place a sort of division between the Higher and the Lower. The history of the world became a battle between the True and the False, in which the details are not all direct representations of the Divine's progressive action but rather distortions of it owing to the mass of resistance offered by the inferior Nature. If there were no such resistance, there would be nothing whatever to conquer in the world, for the world would be harmonious, a constant passage from one perfection to another instead of the conflict which it is—a game of hazards and various possibilities in which the Divine faces real opposition, real difficulty and often real temporary defeat on the way to the final victory. It is just this reality of the whole play that makes it no mere jest. The Divine Will actually suffers distortion the moment it touches the hostile forces in the Ignorance. Hence we must never slacken our efforts to change the world and bring about a different order. We must be vigilant to co-operate with the Divine and not placidly think that whatever happens is always the best. All depends upon the personal attitude. If, in the presence of circumstances that are on the point of occurring, you take the highest possible

attitude — that is to say, if you put your consciousness in contact with the highest consciousness within your reach — you can be absolutely certain that in such a case what happens is the best that can happen to you. But as soon as you fall from this consciousness and come down into a lower state, then it is evident that what happens cannot be the best, since you are not in your best consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo once said, “What happened had to happen, but it could have been much better.” Because the person to whom it happened was not in his highest consciousness, there was no other consequence possible; but if he had brought about a descent of the Divine, then, even if the situation in general had been inevitable, it would have turned out in a different way. What makes all the difference is how you receive the impulsion of the Divine Will.

You must rise very high before you can meet this Will in its plenary splendour of authenticity; not before you open your lower nature to it can it begin to manifest in terms of the Truth. You must, therefore, refrain from applying the merely Nietzschean standard of temporary success in order to differentiate the Divine from the undivine. For, life is a battlefield in which the Divine succeeds in detail only when the lower nature is receptive to its impulsions instead of siding with the hostile forces. And even then the test is not so much external as internal: a divine movement cannot be measured by apparent signs — it is a certain kind of vibration that indicates its presence — external tests are of no avail, since even what is in appearance a failure may be in fact a divine achievement.... What you have to do is to give yourself up to the Grace of the Divine; for, it is under the form of Grace, of Love, that it has consented to uplift the universe after the first involution was established. With the Divine Love is the supreme power of Transformation. It has this power because it is for the sake of Transformation that it has given itself to the world and manifested everywhere. Not only has it infused itself into man, but also into all the atoms of the most obscure Matter in order to bring the world back to the original

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Truth. It is this descent that is called the supreme sacrifice in the Indian scriptures. But it is a sacrifice only from the human point of view; the human mind thinks that if it had to do such a thing it would be a tremendous sacrifice. But the Divine cannot really be diminished, its infinite essence can never become less, no matter what “sacrifices” are made.... The moment you open to the Divine Love, you also receive its power of Transformation. But it is not in terms of quantity that you can measure it; what is essential is the true contact; for, you will find that the true contact with it is sufficient to fill at once the whole of your being.

Supermind and Overmind

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

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

No doubt, the Supermind has also acted in the history of the world but always through the Overmind. It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit. For, in the Overmind there is already the play of possibilities which marks the beginning of this lower triple world of Mind, Life and Matter in which we have our existence. And whenever there is this play and not the spontaneous and infallible working of the innate Truth of the Spirit, there is the seed of distortion and ignorance. Not that

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the Overmind is a field of ignorance; but it is the borderline between the Higher and the Lower, for, the play of possibilities, of separate even if not yet divided choice, is likely to lead to deviation from the Truth of things.

The Overmind, therefore, does not and cannot possess the power to transform humanity into divine nature. For that, the Supramental is the sole effective agent. And what exactly differentiates our Yoga from attempts in the past to spiritualise life is that we know that the splendours of the Overmind are not the highest reality but only an intermediate step between the mind and the true Divine.

True Humility – Supramental Plasticity – Spiritual Rebirth

As I have often been questioned about it, I shall touch briefly on the meaning of true humility, supramental plasticity and spiritual rebirth. Humility is that state of consciousness in which, whatever the realisation, you know the infinite is still in front of you. The rare quality of selfless admiration about which I have spoken to you is but another aspect of true humility; for it is sheer arrogance that refuses to admire and is complacent about its own petty achievements, forgetting the infinite which is always ahead of it. However, you need to be humble not only when you have nothing substantial or divine in you but even when you are on the path of transformation. Paradoxical though it may sound, the Divine who is absolutely perfect is at the same time absolutely humble — humble as nothing else can ever be. He is not occupied in admiring Himself: though He is the All, He ever seeks to find Himself in what is not-Himself — that is why He has created in His own being what seems to be a colossal not-Himself, this phenomenal world. He has passed into a form in which He has to discover endlessly in time the infinite contents of that which He possesses entirely in the eternal consciousness.

One of the greatest victories of this ineffable humility of God will be the transformation of Matter which is apparently the most undivine. Supramental plasticity is an attribute of finally transformed Matter. The supramental body which has to be brought into being here has four main attributes: lightness, adaptability, plasticity and luminosity. When the physical body is thoroughly divinised, it will feel as if it were always walking on air, there will be no heaviness or *tamas* or unconsciousness in it. There will also be no end to its power of adaptability: in

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whatever conditions it is placed it will immediately be equal to the demands made upon it because its full consciousness will drive out all that inertia and incapacity which usually make Matter a drag on the Spirit. Supramental plasticity will enable it to stand the attack of every hostile force which strives to pierce it: it will present no dull resistance to the attack but will be, on the contrary, so pliant as to nullify the force by giving way to it to pass off. Thus it will suffer no harmful consequences and the most deadly attacks will leave it unscathed. Lastly, it will be turned into the stuff of light, each cell will radiate the supramental glory. Not only those who are developed enough to have their subtle sight open but the ordinary man too will be able to perceive this luminosity. It will be an evident fact to each and all, a permanent proof of the transformation which will convince even the most sceptical.

The bodily transformation will be the supreme spiritual rebirth—an utter casting away of all the ordinary past. For spiritual rebirth means the constant throwing away of our previous associations and circumstances and proceeding to live as if at each virgin moment we were starting life anew. It is to be free of what is called Karma, the stream of our past actions: in other words, a liberation from the bondage of Nature's common activity of cause and effect. When this cutting away of the past is triumphantly accomplished in the consciousness, all those mistakes, blunders, errors and follies which, still vivid in our recollection, cling to us like leeches sucking our life-blood, drop away, leaving us most joyfully free. This freedom is not a mere matter of thought; it is the most solid, practical, material fact. We really are free, nothing binds us, nothing affects us, there is no obsession of responsibility. If we want to counteract, annul or outgrow our past, we cannot do it by mere repentance or similar things, we must forget that the untransformed past has ever been and enter into an enlightened state of consciousness which breaks loose from all moorings. To be reborn means to enter, first of all, into our psychic consciousness where we are one

with the Divine and eternally free from the reactions of Karma. Without becoming aware of the psychic, it is not possible to do so; but once we are securely conscious of the true soul in us which is always surrendered to the Divine, all bondage ceases. Then incessantly life begins afresh, then the past no longer cleaves to us. To give you an idea of the final height of spiritual rebirth, I may say that there can be a constant experience of the whole universe actually disappearing at every instant and being at every instant newly created!

The Supramental Realisation

In order to know what the Supramental Realisation will be like, the first step, the first condition is to know what the supramental consciousness is. All those who have been, in one way or another, in contact with it have had some glimpse of the realisation to be. But those who have not, can yet aspire for that realisation, just as they can aspire to get the supramental knowledge. True knowledge means awareness by identity: once you get in touch with the supramental world, you can say something about its descent, but not before. What you can say before is that there will be a new creation upon earth; this you say through faith, since the exact character of it escapes you. And if you are called upon to define realisation, you may declare that, individually speaking, it means the transformation of your ordinary human consciousness into the divine and supramental.

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

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

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.

The Supramental Descent

Do you know what the flower which we have called “Successful Future” signifies when given to you? It signifies the hope — nay, even the promise — that you will participate in the descent of the supramental world. For that descent will be the successful consummation of our work, a descent of which the full glory has not yet been or else the whole face of life would have been different. By slow degrees the Supramental is exerting its influence; now one part of the being and now another feels the embrace or the touch of its divinity; but when it comes down in all its self-existent power, a supreme radical change will seize the whole nature. We are moving nearer and nearer the hour of its complete triumph. Once the world-conditions are ready the full descent will take place carrying everything before it. Its presence will be unmistakable, its force will brook no resistance, doubts and difficulties will not torture you any longer. For the Divine will stand manifest — unveiled in its total perfection. I do not, however, mean to say that the whole world will at once feel its presence or be transformed; but I do mean that a part of humanity will know and participate in its descent — say, this little world of ours here. From there the transfiguring grace will most effectively radiate. And, fortunately for the aspirants, that successful future will materialise for them in spite of all the obstacles set in its way by unregenerate human nature!

On the Dhammapada

Conjugate Verses

Every Friday I shall read out to you a few verses of the Dhammapada, then we shall meditate on that text. This is to teach you mental control. If I think it necessary I shall give you an explanation.

The Dhammapada begins with conjugate verses; here is the first one:

In all things the primordial element is mind. Mind predominates. Everything proceeds from mind.

Naturally, this concerns the physical life, there is no question of the universe.

If a man speaks or acts with an evil mind, suffering follows him as the wheel follows the hoof of the bullock that pulls the cart.

That is to say, ordinary human life, such as it is in the present world, is ruled by the mind; therefore the most important thing is to control one's mind; so we shall follow a graded or "conjugate" discipline, to use the Dhammapada's expression, in order to develop and control our minds.

There are four movements which are usually consecutive, but which in the end may be simultaneous: to observe one's thoughts is the first, to watch over one's thoughts is the second, to control one's thoughts is the third and to master one's thoughts is the fourth. To observe, to watch over, to control, to master. All that to get rid of an evil mind, for we are told that the man who acts or speaks with an evil mind is followed by suffering as closely as the wheel follows the hoof of a bullock that ploughs or draws the cart.

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This is our first meditation.

30 August 1957

Mind predominates. Everything proceeds from mind. In all things the primordial element is mind. If a man speaks or acts with a purified mind, happiness accompanies him as closely as his inseparable shadow.

This is the counterpart of what we read last time. The Dhammapada contrasts a purified mind with an evil mind. We have already said that there are four successive stages for the purification of the mind. A purified mind is naturally a mind that does not admit any wrong thought, and we have seen that the complete mastery of thought which is required to gain this result is the last achievement in the four stages I have spoken of. The first is: to observe one's mind.

Do not believe that it is such an easy thing, for to observe your thoughts, you must first of all separate yourself from them. In the ordinary state, the ordinary man does not distinguish himself from his thoughts. He does not even know that he thinks. He thinks by habit. And if he is asked all of a sudden, "What are you thinking of?", he knows nothing about it. That is to say, ninety-five times out of a hundred he will answer, "I do not know." There is a complete identification between the movement of thought and the consciousness of the being.

To observe the thought, the first movement then is to step back and look at it, to separate yourself from your thoughts so that the movement of the consciousness and that of thought may not be confused. Thus when we say that one must observe one's thoughts, do not believe that it is so simple; it is the first step. I suggest that this evening in our meditation we take up this first exercise which consists in standing back from one's thought and looking at it.

6 September 1957

“He has insulted me, he has beaten me, he has humiliated me, he has robbed me.” Those who nourish thoughts such as these never appease their hatred.

The Dhammapada tells us first of all that bad thoughts bring about suffering and good thoughts bring about happiness. Now it gives examples of what bad thoughts are and tells us how to avoid suffering. Here is the first example, I repeat: “He has insulted me, he has beaten me, he has humiliated me, he has robbed me”; and it adds: “Those who nourish thoughts such as these never appease their hatred.”

We have begun our mental discipline, basing ourselves on the successive stages of mental development and we have seen that this discipline consists of four consecutive movements, which we have described in this way, as you surely remember: to observe, to watch over, to control and to master; and in the course of the last lesson we have learnt — I hope — to separate ourselves from our thoughts so as to be able to observe them as an attentive spectator.

Today we have to learn how to watch over these thoughts. First you look at them and then you watch over them. Learn to look at them as an enlightened judge so that you may distinguish between the good and the bad, between thoughts that are useful and those that are harmful, between constructive thoughts that lead to victory and defeatist thoughts which turn us away from it. It is this power of discernment that we must acquire now; that will be the subject of our meditation tonight.

As I have told you, the Dhammapada will give us examples, but examples are only examples. We must ourselves learn how to distinguish thoughts that are good from those that are not, and for that you must observe, as I have said, like an enlightened judge — that is to say, as impartially as possible; it is one of the most indispensable conditions.

13 September 1957

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“He has insulted me, he has beaten me, he has humiliated me, he has robbed me.” Those who do not nourish thoughts such as these foster no hatred.

This is the counterpart of what we read the other day. But note that this concerns only thoughts that generate resentment. It is because rancour, along with jealousy, is one of the most widespread causes of human misery.

But how to avoid having rancour? A large and generous heart is certainly the best means, but that is not within the reach of all. Controlling one's thought may be of more general use.

Thought-control is the third step of our mental discipline. Once the enlightened judge of our consciousness has distinguished between useful and harmful thoughts, the inner guard will come and allow to pass only approved thoughts, strictly refusing admission to all undesirable elements.

With a commanding gesture the guard will refuse entry to every bad thought and push it back as far as possible.

It is this movement of admission and refusal that we call thought-control and this will be the subject of our meditation tonight.

20 September 1957

For, in truth, in this world hatred is not appeased by hatred; hatred is appeased by love alone. This is the eternal law.

This is one of the most celebrated verses of the Dhammapada, one of those most often cited — I would have liked to be able to say, “one of the most obeyed in the world”; unfortunately that would not be true. For people speak much of this teaching but do not follow it.

Yet, there is one aspect of the problem which is less spoken of but which seems perhaps more urgent still if you want things to change in the world, something to which people give very little

thought. I am going to surprise you. It is this: if love must be returned for hatred in order that the world may change, would it not be even more natural that love should be returned for Love?

If one considers the life and action and heart of men as they are, one would have every right to be surprised at all the hatred, contempt, or at best, the indifference which are returned for this immensity of Love which the divine Grace pours upon the world, for this immensity of Love which acts upon the world at every second to lead it towards the divine delight and which finds so poor a response in the human heart. But people have compassion only for the wicked, the deficient, the misshapen, for the unsuccessful ones and the failures — truly it is an encouragement to wickedness and failure.

If one thought a little more of this aspect of the problem, perhaps one would have less need to insist on the necessity of returning love for hatred, because if the human heart responded in all sincerity to the Love that is being poured into it with the spontaneous gratitude of a love which understands and appreciates, then things would change quickly in the world.

27 September 1957

Many are those who are not aware that one day we all must die. And those who are aware of it appease their quarrels.

When you think you may die the next moment, immediately, automatically, there occurs in you a detachment from all material things; it is logical that from then on you think only of what does not depend upon this physical life and which is the only thing that will still belong to you once you have left this body, that is to say, the eternal existence. The Buddha did not use the word “Divine”, but it is essentially the same thing.

To think that one might die the next moment was formerly, in the ancient initiations, a discipline that one had to follow for a

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certain time, for the reason I have just mentioned and also in order to overcome all fear of death and to accustom oneself to it. In that age and at the time when the Dhammapada was spoken by the Buddha, the possibility of an earthly immortality was never mentioned because this possibility belonged to such a far-off future that there would have been no point in speaking of it.

Today Sri Aurobindo tells us that this possibility is near at hand and that we have only to prepare for it. But the essential condition even to prepare for it is to completely abolish all fear of death.

You must neither fear it nor desire it.

Stand above it, in an absolute tranquillity, neither fear it nor desire it.

4 October 1957

Just as the strong wind uproots a feeble tree, so Mara overwhelms the man who lives only in pursuit of pleasure, who does not control his senses, who knows not how to moderate his appetite, who is lazy and wastes his energies.

In Buddhist literature, Mara represents the Spirit of Evil, all that is contrary or opposed to the spiritual life; in certain cases he represents death — not so much physical death as death to truth, to the spiritual being.

Here, it means that so long as one does not control one's senses and desires, and concerns oneself with external material satisfactions as the most important thing, one has not the will necessary to resist the attack of hostile forces and all that pulls us down and leads us away from the spiritual reality.

The Dhammapada does not take its stand so much on the moral point of view; it is not evil as men understand it with their blind justice and their arbitrary sense of good and bad. Evil, from the spiritual point of view, is truly that which leads us away from the goal, which sometimes even tears us away from

the deepest purpose of our existence, from the truth of our being and prevents us from realising it.

This is the way in which it should be understood.

11 October 1957

*Just as the strong wind has no hold upon a mighty rock,
so Mara has no hold upon a man who does not live in
pursuit of pleasure, who has good control of his senses,
who knows how to moderate his appetite, who is en-
dowed with unshakable faith and who wastes not his
energies.*

What the Dhammapada means when it speaks of faith is not at all the belief in a dogma or a religion, it is not even faith in the teaching of the Master; it is faith in one's own possibilities, the certitude that whatever the difficulties, whatever the obstacles, whatever the imperfections, even the negations in the being, one is born for the realisation and one *will* realise.

The will must never falter, the effort must be persevering and the faith unshakable. Then instead of spending years to realise what one has to realise, one can do it in a few months, sometimes even in a few days and, if there is sufficient intensity, in a few hours. That is to say, you can take a position within yourself and no bad will that attacks the realisation will have any more power over you than the storm has over a rock.

After that, the way is no longer difficult; it becomes extraordinarily interesting.

18 October 1957

*He who puts on the yellow robe while he is yet impure,
lacking in self-control and lacking in loyalty, truly he is
unworthy to wear the yellow robe of the monk.*

Of course, the yellow robe, in the literal sense, is the robe of the Buddhist monks; it became the robe of all who practised

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asceticism. But this is not what the Dhammapada truly means to say, because there is no lack of men who wear the yellow robe but are not purified of their taints. The yellow robe is taken as the symbol of consecration to the spiritual life, the external sign of renunciation of all that is not an exclusive concentration upon the spiritual life.

What Buddhism means by “impurities” is chiefly egoism and ignorance; because, from the Buddhist standpoint, the greatest of all taints is ignorance, not ignorance of external things, of the laws of Nature and of all that you learn at school, but the ignorance of the deepest truth of things, of the law of the being, of the Dharma.

It is noteworthy that the two defects insisted upon here are lack of self-control and lack of loyalty. Loyalty means here sincerity, honesty; what the Dhammapada censures most severely is hypocrisy: to pretend that you want to live the spiritual life and not to do it, to pretend that you want to seek the truth and not to do it, to display the external signs of consecration to the divine life — here symbolised by the yellow robe — but within to be concerned only with oneself, one’s selfishness and one’s own needs.

It is interesting to note the insistence of the Dhammapada on self-control, for according to the Buddhist teaching, excess in all things is bad. The Buddha always insisted on the Middle Path. You must not be too much on one side nor too much on the other, exaggerate one thing or the other. You must have measure, balance in all things, the balance of moderation.

Therefore the qualities that make you worthy of leading the spiritual life are to have an inner balance, a balance in your action, and to be moderate in everything, to be sincere, honest, loyal.

Balance, moderation, loyalty, honesty: this is the subject of our meditation.

8 November 1957

But he who has discarded all impurity, who is firmly attached to the precepts of morality, who knows how to moderate his appetite and who is loyal, he, truly, is worthy to wear the yellow robe.

I would not like you to take this text as a moral catechism. It certainly has a much deeper and truer meaning, because in all truly spiritual teachings, morality as it is mentally conceived is out of place.

So too the word “impurity”. Pure, as it is understood morally, has not at all the meaning it is given in a truly spiritual teaching; and particularly from the Buddhist standpoint, purity is absence of ignorance, as I have already told you last time, and ignorance means ignoring the inner law, the truth of the being. And loyalty means not to take the illusion for the reality, the changing and fluctuating appearances for the inner and real permanence of the being.

We can say then that self-control and self-mastery, measure, absence of desire, the search for the inner truth of the being and the law of its self-manifestation are very necessary preoccupations for those who want to practise the spiritual life.

To be true to oneself, to one’s goal, not to let oneself be moved by disorderly impulses, not to take the changing appearances for the Reality, these are the virtues that one must have in order to progress on the way of spirituality.

15 November 1957

Those who take error for truth, and the truth for error, will never attain the supreme goal, for they are led astray by vain desires and false views.

A comment could be added; for, if one were satisfied with taking error for truth and truth for error, it should be logically very easy to make one’s choice as soon as one found for some reason or other or with some help, what is truly the truth and what is

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truly the error; one adopts the truth and rejects the error. But unfortunately one loves one's error, somewhere in the being there is an unwillingness to recognise what is true.

My experience is like this: whenever you sincerely want to know the truth, you do know it. There is *always* something to point out the error to you, to make you recognise the truth. And if you observe yourself attentively you find out that it is because you prefer error that you do not find the truth.

Even in small details, the very smallest — not to speak of the big things of life, the big decisions that one has to take — even in the smallest things, whenever the aspiration for the truth and the will to be true are wholly sincere, the indication always comes. And precisely, with the method of the Buddhist discipline, if you follow up within yourself the causes of your way of being, you always find out that persistence in error comes from desire. It is because you have the preference, the desire to feel, to act, to think in a particular way, that you make the mistake. It is not simply because you do not know what is true. You do not know it precisely because you say in a vague, general, imprecise way, "Oh, I want the truth." In fact, if you take a detail, each detail, and put your finger on it, you discover that you are playing the ostrich in order not to see. You put up something uncertain, something vague, a veil, in order not to see behind it.

Whenever there is sincerity, you find that the help, the guidance, the grace are always there to give you the answer and you are not mistaken for long.

It is this sincerity in the aspiration for progress, in the will for truth, in the need to be truly pure — pure as it is understood in the spiritual life — it is this sincerity which is the key to all progress. With it you know — and you *can*.

There is always, somewhere in the being, something which prefers to deceive itself, otherwise the light is there, always ready to guide, but you shut your eyes in order not to see it.

22 November 1957

Those who know the true to be true and the false to be false, they attain the supreme goal, for they pursue right desires and correct views.

We saw last time that it is not sufficient to be able to distinguish what is right from what is wrong. At first sight this seems to be the most difficult point. It is quite obvious that if everyone had to find it out for himself, it would be a very long work; you can pass your whole life going through innumerable experiences which little by little will enlighten you as to what is right and what is not.

Therefore it is easier to rely on someone who has done the work before you and whom you have simply to ask, "Is this true? Is that false?" Evidently, that offers a great advantage, but unfortunately it is not always sufficient; for if you have the desire that things should be in a certain way and that what you prefer should be right, then you are not always ready to listen to good advice.

The last sentence, "for they pursue right desires", which seems to be a commonplace, is perhaps the most difficult part of the problem.

In this book, in this teaching, there are short sentences that appear so simple. If you read without sufficient reflection, you tell yourself, "But it is self-evident, you recognise as true what is true and as false what is false, what does that mean then?" But first of all it is not so easy to distinguish what is true from what is not, then to recognise, that is to say, to admit that a certain thing is true; and above all it is more difficult still perhaps to recognise that a certain thing is false.

In reality, in order to discern exactly what is false requires such sincerity in the aspiration, such resolution in the will to be true that even this little phrase "to know the true to be true and the false to be false" means a very considerable realisation. And the conclusion, "they attain the supreme goal" is a great promise.

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There are teachings which say that one must have no desire at all; they are the ones that aim at a complete withdrawal from life in order to enter into the immobility of the Spirit, the absence of all activity, all movement, all form, all external reality. To attain that one must have no desire at all, that is to say, one must completely leave behind all will for progress; progress itself becomes something unreal and external. But if in your conception of Yoga you keep the idea of progress, and if you admit that the whole universe follows a progression, then what you have to do is to shift the objective of desire; instead of turning it towards things that are external, artificial, superficial and egoistical, you must join it as a force of realisation to the aspiration directed to the truth.

These few words, “they pursue right desires”, are a proof that the teaching of the Buddha, in its essence, did not turn away from the realisation upon earth, but only from what is false in the conception of the world and in activities as they are carried on in the world. Thus when he teaches that one must escape from life, it is not to escape from a life that would be the expression of the truth but from the illusory life as it is ordinarily lived in the world.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that in order to reach the Truth and to have the power of realising this Truth you must join the spiritual consciousness to a progressive mental consciousness.

And these few words certainly prove that such was the original conception of the Buddhist teaching.

6 December 1957

Just as the rain penetrates through the thatch of a leaking roof, so the passions penetrate an unbalanced mind.

There are innumerable small Buddhist sects of all kinds, in China, in Japan, in Burma, and each one follows its own methods; but the most widespread among them are those whose sole practice is to make the mind quiet.

They sit down for a few hours in the day and even at night and quiet their mind. This is for them the key to all realisation — a quiet mind that knows how to keep quiet for hours together without roving. You must not believe however that it is a very easy thing to do, but they have no other object. They do not concentrate upon any thought, they do not try to understand better, to know more, nothing of the kind; for them the only way is to have a quiet mind and sometimes they pass through years and years of effort before they arrive at this result — to silence the mind, to keep it absolutely silent and still; for, as it is said here in the Dhammapada, if the mind is unbalanced, then this constant movement of ideas following one another, sometimes without any order, ideas contradicting and opposing each other, ideas that speculate on things, all that jostles about in the head, makes holes in the roof, as it were. So through these holes all undesirable movements enter into the consciousness, as water enters into a house with a leaky roof.

However that may be, I believe it is a practice to be recommended to everyone: to keep a certain time every day for trying to make the mind quiet, even, still. And it is an undeniable fact that the more mentally developed one is, the quicker one succeeds; and the more the mind is in a rudimentary state, the more difficult it is.

Those who are at the bottom of the scale, who have never trained their minds, find it necessary to speak in order to think. It happens even that it is the sound of their voice which enables them to associate ideas; if they do not express them, they do not think. At a higher level there are those who still have to move words about in their heads in order to think, even though they do not utter them aloud. Those who truly begin to think are those who are able to think without words, that is to say, to be in contact with the idea and express it through a wide variety of words and phrases. There are higher degrees — many higher degrees — but those who think without words truly begin to reach an intellectual state and for them it is much easier to make

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the mind quiet, that is to say, to stop the movement of associating the words that constantly move about like passers-by in a public square, and to contemplate an idea in silence.

I emphasise this fact because there are quite a few people who, when mental silence has been transmitted to them by occult means, are immediately alarmed and afraid of losing their intelligence. Because they can no longer think, they fear they may become stupid! But to cease thinking is a much higher achievement than to be able to spin out thoughts endlessly and it demands a much greater development.

So from every point of view, and not only from the spiritual point of view, it is always very good to practise silence for a few minutes, at least twice a day, but it must be a true silence, not merely abstention from talking.

Now let us try to be completely silent for a few minutes.

(Meditation)

13 December 1957

Just as the rain cannot penetrate a house well covered with thatch, so also the passions cannot penetrate a balanced mind.

(It begins to rain.) That's it. The mind of the sky must be out of balance. *(Laughter)* It is raining.

So I think the sky has no balance and it is better for you to go home. *(It rains harder.)* Well, there is nothing to be done!

The balance is not being restored. You should all go home and meditate on the necessity of having a balanced mind. That's all.

20 December 1957

In the two worlds, in this world and in the other, one who does evil grieves. He laments and suffers as he recalls his evil deeds.

It is quite evident that when you act in an ugly and mean way, naturally you are unhappy; but to be unhappy because you are conscious of the ugliness of your actions seems to me to be already a very advanced stage, for one needs to be very conscious in order to be aware of the evil that one does, and to be conscious of the evil that one does is already a first step towards not doing it any more.

Generally, people are altogether blind to the ugliness of their own actions. They do wrong through ignorance, through unconsciousness, through smallness, through that sort of doubling back on oneself which comes from unconsciousness and ignorance, that obscure instinct of self-preservation which makes one ready to sacrifice the whole world for the sake of one's own well-being. And the smaller one is, the more natural appears the sacrifice offered to one's smallness.

One must be very much higher on the scale to see that what one does is ugly. One must already have at the core of oneself a kind of foreknowledge of what beauty, nobility, generosity are, to be able to suffer from the fact that one doesn't carry them within oneself.

I think the Dhammapada speaks here of those who already know what is beautiful and noble and who do evil wilfully, deliberately. For them life becomes terribly painful indeed. To do persistently what one knows should not be done, is at the cost of all peace, all possible tranquillity, all the well-being that one can have. He who lies is constantly uneasy in the fear that his lie may be discovered; he who has acted wrongly is in a constant anxiety at the idea that perhaps he will be punished; he who tries to deceive has no peace lest it should be found out that he deceives.

In reality, even for a purely egoistic reason, to do good, to be just, straight, honest is the best means to be quiet and peaceful, to reduce one's anxiety to a minimum. And if, besides, one could be disinterested, free from personal motives and egoism, then it would be possible to become truly happy.

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You carry with you, around you, in you, the atmosphere created by your actions, and if what you do is beautiful, good and harmonious, your atmosphere is beautiful, good and harmonious; on the other hand, if you live in a sordid selfishness, unscrupulous self-interest, ruthless bad will, that is what you will breathe every moment of your life and that means misery, constant uneasiness; it means ugliness that despairs of its own ugliness.

And you must not believe that by leaving the body you will free yourself of this atmosphere; on the contrary, the body is a kind of a veil of unconsciousness which diminishes the intensity of the suffering. If you are without the protection of the body in the most material vital life, the suffering becomes much more acute and you no longer have the opportunity to change what is to be changed, to correct what is to be corrected, to open yourself to a higher, happier and more luminous life and consciousness.

You must make haste to do your work here, for it is here that you can truly do it.

Expect nothing from death. Life is your salvation.

It is in life that you must transform yourself. It is upon earth that you progress and it is upon earth that you realise. It is in the body that you win the Victory.

27 December 1957

One who does good rejoices in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. He rejoices more and more as he recalls his good deeds.

One who does evil suffers in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. "I have done wrong": this thought torments him. And his torments increase still more as he follows the way which leads to the infernal world.

One who does good rejoices in the two worlds, in this

world and in the other. "I have done good": the thought rejoices him and his happiness increases more and more as he follows the way that leads to the celestial world.

It would almost seem from these texts that Buddhism accepts the idea of a hell and a heaven; but that is quite a superficial way of understanding; for, in a deeper sense, this was not the thought of the Buddha. The idea on which he always insisted is that you create, by your conduct and the state of your consciousness, the world in which you live. Everyone carries in himself the world in which he lives and in which he will continue to live even when he loses his body, because, according to the Buddha's teaching, there is, so to say, no difference between life in the body and life outside the body.

Some persons believe, some traditions teach that to leave the body is a blessing and that all difficulties disappear, provided, however, you fulfil certain rites, as in some religions, and that is also why so much importance is given to the religious rites which are, as it were, a passport for going to a happier region once you have left the body. Some even imagine that as soon as you leave the body you at once leave your miseries behind; but it is far from being true and this is what the Dhammapada points out here: what it calls the infernal world consists of psychological ranges, particular states of consciousness you enter when you do wrong, that is to say, when you stray away from all that is beautiful, pure, happy and you live in ugliness and wickedness. Nothing is more disheartening than to live in an atmosphere of wickedness.

What the Dhammapada says here in an almost puerile way is essentially true. Naturally, it does not refer to those who think, "Oh, how good I am, how nice I am!" and therefore feel happy. That is childishness. But when you are good, when you are generous, noble, disinterested, kind, you create in you, around you, a particular atmosphere and this atmosphere is a sort of luminous release. You breathe, you blossom like a flower in

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the sun; there is no painful recoil on yourself, no bitterness, no revolt, no miseries. Spontaneously, naturally, the atmosphere becomes luminous and the air you breathe is full of happiness. And this is the air that you breathe, in your body and out of your body, in the waking state and in the state of sleep, in life and in the passage beyond life, outside earthly life until your new life.

Every wrong action produces on the consciousness the effect of a wind that withers, of a cold that freezes or of burning flames that consume.

Every good and kind deed brings light, restfulness, joy — the sunshine in which flowers bloom.

3 January 1958

Even though he may recite a great number of sacred texts, if he does not act accordingly, the foolish one will be like the cowherd who counts the cows of others. He cannot share in the life of the disciples of the Blessed One.

Though he may recite only a tiny portion of the sacred texts, if he puts into practice their teaching, having rejected all passion, all ill-will and all delusion, he possesses the true wisdom; his mind completely freed, no longer attached to anything, belonging neither to this world nor to any other, he shares in the life of the disciples of the Blessed One.

The thing has been so often said and repeated that it seems quite unnecessary to insist on the fact that a mite of practice is infinitely more precious than mountains of talk. Surely, all the energy that one spends in explaining a theory would be much better utilised in overcoming in oneself a weakness or a defect.

Therefore to conform to the wisdom of this teaching, we

shall consider the best means of rejecting all passion and ill-will and delusion.

The delusion consists in taking the appearance for the reality and transient things for the only thing worthy of pursuit, the everlasting Truth.

It is rather interesting to note that the Dhammapada clearly underlines that it is not enough to be free from the bonds of this world only, but of all the worlds.

For the true and zealous Buddhists tell you that ordinary religions captivate you by enticing you with the glittering advantages that you will find after death in their Paradise, if you practise their principles. Buddhism, on the other hand, has neither hell nor heaven. It does not terrify you with eternal punishment nor does it tempt you with celestial felicities.

It is in the pure Truth that you will find your satisfaction and the reward of all your efforts.

10 January 1958

Vigilance

Vigilance is the way that leads to immortality (or Nirvana). Negligence is the way that leads to death. Those who are vigilant do not die. Those who are negligent are dead already.

In these texts the word Nirvana is not used in the sense of annihilation, as you see, but in the sense of an eternal existence in opposition to life and death, as we know them in the present earthly existence, and which are contrary to each other: life contrary to death, death contrary to life. It is not *that* life which is spoken of, but the eternal existence which is beyond life and death — the true existence.

Vigilance means to be awake, to be on one's guard, to be sincere — never to be taken by surprise. When you want to do sadhana, at each moment of your life, there is a choice between taking a step that leads to the goal and falling asleep or sometimes even going backwards, telling yourself, "Oh, later on, not immediately" — sitting down on the way.

To be vigilant is not merely to resist what pulls you downward, but above all to be alert in order not to lose any opportunity to progress, any opportunity to overcome a weakness, to resist a temptation, any opportunity to learn something, to correct something, to master something. If you are vigilant, you can do in a few days what would otherwise take years. If you are vigilant, you change each circumstance of your life, each action, each movement into an occasion for coming nearer the goal.

There are two kinds of vigilance, active and passive. There is a vigilance that gives you a warning if you are about to make a mistake, if you are making a wrong choice, if you are being weak or allowing yourself to be tempted, and there is the active

vigilance which seeks an opportunity to progress, seeks to utilise every circumstance to advance more quickly.

There is a difference between preventing yourself from falling and advancing more quickly.

And both are absolutely necessary.

He who is not vigilant is already dead. He has lost contact with the true purpose of existence and of life.

So the hours, circumstances, life pass in vain, bringing nothing, and you awake from your somnolence in a hole from which it is very difficult to escape.

17 January 1958

Having fully understood what vigilance is, the sages delight in it and take their pleasure in the presence of the Great Ones.

Throughout this teaching there is one thing to be noticed; it is this: you are never told that to live well, to think well, is the result of a struggle or of a sacrifice; on the contrary it is a delightful state which cures all suffering. At that time, the time of the Buddha, to live a spiritual life was a joy, a beatitude, the happiest state, which freed you from all the troubles of the world, all the sufferings, all the cares, making you happy, satisfied, contented.

It is the materialism of modern times that has turned spiritual effort into a hard struggle and a sacrifice, a painful renunciation of all the so-called joys of life.

This insistence on the exclusive reality of the physical world, of physical pleasures, physical joys, physical possessions, is the result of the whole materialistic tendency of human civilisation. It was unthinkable in ancient times. On the contrary, withdrawal, concentration, liberation from all material cares, consecration to the spiritual joy, that was happiness indeed.

From this point of view it is quite evident that humanity is far from having progressed; and those who were born into

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the world in the centres of materialistic civilisation have in their subconscious this horrible notion that only material realities are real and that to be concerned with things that are not material represents a wonderful spirit of sacrifice, an almost sublime effort. Not to be preoccupied from dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn with all the little physical satisfactions, physical pleasures, physical sensations, physical preoccupations, is to bear evidence of a remarkable spirit. One is not aware of it, but the whole of modern civilisation is built on this conception: "Ah, what you can touch, you are sure that is true; what you can see, you are sure that is true; what you have eaten, you are sure of having eaten it; but all the rest — pooh! We are not sure whether they are not vain dreams and whether we are not giving up the real for the unreal, the substance for the shadow. After all, what are you going to gain? A few dreams! But when you have some coins in your pocket, you are sure that they are there!"

And that is everywhere, underneath everything. Scratch the appearances just a little, it is there, within your consciousness; and from time to time you hear this thing whispering within you, "Take care, don't be taken in." Indeed, it is lamentable.

We have been told that evolution is progressive and that it follows a spiral of ascending progression. I do not doubt that what one calls comfort in modern cities is a much higher degree of evolution than the comfort of the cave-man. But in ancient narratives, they always spoke of a power of foresight, of the prophetic spirit, the announcement of future events through visions, life's intimacy with something more subtle that had for the simple people of that age a more concrete reality.

Now, in those beautiful cities that are so comfortable, when one wants to condemn anything, what does one say? — "It's a dream, it is imagination."

And precisely, if a person lives in an inner perception, people look at him slightly askance and wonder whether he is altogether mentally sound. One who does not pass his time in striving for wealth or in trying to increase his comforts and well-being, to

secure a good position and become an important person, a man who is not like that is mistrusted, people wonder whether he is in his right mind.

And all that is so much the stuff of the atmosphere, the content of the air you breathe, the orientation of the thoughts received from others that it seems absolutely natural. You do not feel that it is a grotesque monstrosity.

To become a little more conscious of oneself, to enter into relation with the life behind the appearances, does not seem to you to be the greatest good. When you sit in a comfortable chair, in front of a lavish meal, when you fill your stomach with delicious dishes, that certainly appears to you much more concrete and much more interesting. And if you look at the day that has passed, if you take stock of your day, if you have had some material advantage, some pleasure, a physical satisfaction, you mark it as a good day; but if you have received a good lesson from life, if it has given you a knock on your nose to tell you that you are a stupid fellow, you do not give thanks to the Grace, you say, "Oh, life is not always fun!"

When I read these ancient texts, I really have the impression that from the inner point of view, from the point of view of the true life, we have fallen back terribly and that for the acquisition of a few ingenious mechanisms, a few encouragements to physical laziness, the acquisition of instruments and gadgets that lessen the effort of living, we have renounced the reality of the inner life. It is that sense which has been lost and it needs an effort for you to think of learning the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, the goal towards which we must advance, towards which all life advances, whether you want it or not. One step towards the goal, oh! it needs so much effort to do that. And generally one thinks of it only when the outer circumstances are not pleasant.

How far we are from the times when the shepherd, who did not go to school and kept watch over his flock at night under the stars, could read in the stars what was going to happen,

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commune with something which expressed itself through Nature, and had the sense of the profound beauty and that peace which a simple life gives!

It is very unfortunate that one has to give up one thing in order to gain another. When I speak of the inner life, I am far from opposing any modern inventions, far from it, but how much these inventions have made us artificial and stupid! How much we have lost the sense of true beauty, how much we burden ourselves with useless needs!

Perhaps the time has come to continue the ascent in the curve of the spiral and now with all that this knowledge of matter has brought us, we shall be able to give to our spiritual progress a more solid basis. Strong with what we have learnt of the secrets of material Nature, we shall be able to join the two extremes and rediscover the supreme Reality in the very heart of the atom.

24 January 1958

Those who are intelligent, meditative, persevering, who ceaselessly struggle with themselves, attain to Nirvana, which is the supreme felicity.

Whosoever can sustain his zeal, remain pure in his actions, act wisely, restrain his passions, live according to the Law (or to morality), he shall see his renown increase.

This promise of a good name does not seem to me quite worthy of the Buddhist teaching. It probably meant something else. And to live according to morality, one must know which morality is intended, for if it is the usually recognised social morality, that also does not seem to me a very alluring promise. Those who have decided to abandon all worldly weaknesses certainly do not care about satisfying social morality... nor about acquiring a good name!

To sustain one's zeal is an excellent thing, to remain pure in one's actions is also indispensable, to act wisely is also perfect, one cannot do it too often; to restrain one's passions, that goes without saying, is the beginning... but that conclusion!!

However I see "Dhamma" has been translated here as "Law", and "Yasa" as "renown", whereas Dhamma should mean rather the inner truth and Yasa the spiritual glory. So we can interpret the text in this way: "Whosoever can sustain his zeal, remain pure in his actions, act wisely, restrain his passions, live according to the inner truth, he shall see his spiritual glory ever growing."

Thus understood, this text is quite excellent. One cannot do better than to conform to it.

31 January 1958 and 7 February 1958

By his effort, his vigilance, his discipline and self-mastery, the intelligent man should create for himself an island which no flood can submerge.

The fools, devoid of intelligence, give themselves up to negligence. The true sage guards vigilance as his most precious treasure.

Do not let yourself fall into carelessness, nor into the pleasures of the senses. He who is vigilant and given to meditation acquires a great happiness.

The intelligent man who by his vigilance has dispelled negligence, mounts to the heights of wisdom, whence he looks upon the many afflicted as one on a mountain looks down upon the people of the plain.

Vigilant among those who are negligent, perfectly awake among those who sleep, the intelligent man advances like a rapid steed leaving behind a weary horse.

Questions and Answers

Vigilance is admired. Negligence is reproved. By vigilance, Indra became the highest among the gods.

The Bhikkhu¹ who delights in vigilance and who shuns negligence advances like a fire consuming all bonds, both small and great.

The Bhikkhu who takes pleasure in vigilance and who shuns negligence can no longer fall. He draws near to Nirvana.

I have read out to you the whole chapter because it seemed to me that it is the totality of the verses that creates an atmosphere and that they are meant to be taken all together and not each one separately. But I strongly recommend to you not to take the words used here in their usual literal sense.

Thus, for example, I am quite convinced that the original thought did not mean that you are to be vigilant in order that you may be admired and that you must not be negligent in order not to be reproved. Besides, the example given proves it, for certainly it was not for the sake of gaining admiration that Indra, the chief of the overmental gods in the Hindu tradition, practised vigilance. It is a very childish way of saying things. Yet, if you take these verses all together, they have by their repetition and insistence, a power that evokes the thing which seeks expression; it puts you in relation with a psychological attitude which is very useful and has a very considerable effect, if you follow this discipline.

The last two verses particularly are very evocative. The Bhikkhu moves forward like a burning flame of aspiration and he shuns negligence.

Negligence truly means the relaxation of the will which makes one forget his goal and pass his time in doing all kinds

¹ Member of the Sangha (Buddhist community), mendicant monk who owns nothing.

of things which, far from contributing towards the goal to be attained, stop you on the path and often turn you away from it. Therefore the flame of aspiration makes the Bhikkhu shun negligence. Every moment he remembers that time is relatively short, that one must not waste it on the way, one must go quickly, as quickly as possible, without losing a moment. And one who is vigilant, who does not waste his time, sees his bonds falling, every one, great and small; all his difficulties vanish, because of his vigilance; and if he persists in his attitude, finding in it entire satisfaction, it happens after a time that the happiness he feels in being vigilant becomes so strong that he would soon feel very unhappy if he were to lose this vigilance.

It is a fact that when one has made an effort not to lose time on the way, any time lost becomes a suffering and one can find no pleasure of any kind in it. And once you are in that state, once this effort for progress and transformation becomes the most important thing in your life, the thing to which you give constant thought, then indeed you are on the way towards the eternal existence, the truth of your being.

Certainly there is a moment in the course of the inner growth when far from having to make an effort to concentrate, to become absorbed in the contemplation and the seeking of the truth and its best expression — what the Buddhists call meditation — you feel, on the contrary, a kind of relief, ease, rest, joy, and to have to come out of that in order to deal with things that are not essential, everything that may seem like a waste of time, becomes terribly painful. External activities get reduced to what is absolutely necessary, to those that are done as service to the Divine. All that is futile, useless, precisely those things which seem like a waste of time and effort, all that, far from giving the least satisfaction, creates a kind of discomfort and fatigue; you feel happy only when you are concentrated on your goal.

Then you are really on the way.

14 February 1958

The Mind

Just as the arrow-maker straightens his arrows, so also the intelligent man straightens his thoughts, wavering and fickle, difficult to keep straight, difficult to master.

Just as a fish cast out of the water, our mind quivers and gasps when it leaves behind the kingdom of Mara.

Difficult to master and unstable is the mind, forever in search of pleasure. It is good to govern it. A mind that is controlled brings happiness.

The sage should remain master of his thoughts, for they are subtle and difficult to seize and always in search of pleasure. A mind that is well guided brings happiness.

Wandering afar, solitary, bodiless and hidden in the deep cave of the heart, such is the mind. Whosoever succeeds in bringing it under control liberates himself from the fetters of Mara.

The intelligence of one whose mind is unstable, who is ignorant of the true Law, and whose faith is wavering will never be able to develop.

If a man's thoughts are not agitated, if his mind is not troubled by desire, if he no longer cares for good and evil, this man, wide awake, knows nothing of fear.

Observing that the body is as fragile as a jar, and fortifying the mind like a city at arms, one should attack Mara with the blade of intelligence and should guard carefully whatever has been won.

Before long this body will be lying on the earth, abandoned, as lifeless as a piece of old wood.

Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, the harm caused by a misdirected mind is even greater still.

Neither mother nor father nor any other kinsman can do so much good as a well-directed mind.

These few verses correspond to all the needs of those whose mind has not been mastered. They point out the attachment that one has to one's old ways of being, thinking and reacting, even when one is trying to get away from them. As soon as you emerge by your effort, you are like a fish out of water and you gasp for breath because you are no longer in your element of obscure desires.

Even when you make a resolution, the mind remains unstable. It is subtle, difficult to seize. Without seeming to do so, it is continually seeking its own satisfaction; and its intentions are hidden in the core of the heart so as not to show their true nature.

And while not forgetting the weakness of the body, you must try to strengthen the mind against its own weakness; with the sword of wisdom, you must fight against the hostile forces and treasure the progress you have made so that these forces may not despoil you of your progress, for they are terrible thieves.

And then there is a short couplet for those who are afraid of death, intended to liberate them from that fear. Finally there is a last short couplet for those who are attached to their family to show them the vanity of this attachment.

In the end, a last warning: an ill-directed, ill-controlled thought does more harm than an enemy can do to an enemy or a hater to a hater. That is to say, even those who have the best intentions in the world, if they do not have a wise control over

Questions and Answers

their thought, will do more harm to themselves and to those whom they love than an enemy can do to an enemy or a hater to a hater.

The mind has a power of deception in its own regard which is incalculable. It clothes its desires and preferences with all kinds of wonderful intentions and it hides its trickeries, resentments and disappointments under the most favourable appearances.

To overcome all that, you must have the fearlessness of a true warrior, and an honesty, a straightforwardness, a sincerity that never fail.

28 February 1958

The Flowers

Who will conquer this world of illusion and the kingdom of Yama¹ and the world of the gods? Who will discover the path of the Law as the skilled gardener discovers the rarest of flowers?

The disciple on the right path will conquer this world of illusion and the kingdom of Yama and the world of the gods. He will discover the path of the Law as the skilled gardener discovers the rarest of flowers.

Knowing his body to be as impermanent as foam and as illusory as a mirage, the disciple on the right path will shatter the flowery arrow of Mara and will rise beyond the reach of the King of Death.

Death carries away the man who seeks only the flowers of sensual pleasure just as torrential floods carry away a sleeping village.

Death, the destroyer, overcomes the man who seeks only the flowers of sensual pleasure before he can satisfy himself.

The sage should go from door to door in his village, as the bee gathers honey from the flowers without bringing harm to their colours or their fragrance.

Do not criticise others for what they do or have not done, but be aware of what, yourself, you do or have not done.

¹ The God of Death.

Questions and Answers

Just as a beautiful flower which is radiant yet lacks fragrance, so are the beautiful words of one who does not act accordingly.

Just as a beautiful flower which is both radiant and sweetly scented, so are the beautiful words of one who acts accordingly.

Just as many garlands can be made from a heap of flowers, so a mortal can accumulate much merit by good deeds.

The fragrance of flowers, even that of sandalwood or of incense, even that of jasmine, cannot go against the wind; but the sweet fragrance of intelligence goes against the wind. All around the man of intelligence spreads the fragrance of his virtue.

No fragrance, not even that of sandalwood or incense, nor of the lotus nor of jasmine, can be compared with the fragrance of intelligence.

Weak is the fragrance of incense or sandalwood compared to that of a virtuous man which reaches up to the highest of divinities.

Mara cannot discover the way that those beings follow who lead a life of perfect purity and who are liberated by their total knowledge.

As the beautiful scented lily rises by the wayside, even so the disciple of the Perfectly Enlightened One,² radiant with intelligence, rises from the blind and ignorant multitude.

² The Buddha.

On the Dhammapada

There are some very wise recommendations here, for example, not to concern oneself with what others do nor with the mistakes they make, but to attend to one's own faults and negligences and rectify them. Another wise counsel is never to utter too many eloquent words which are not effectuated in action—speak little, act well. Beautiful words, they say, that are mere words, are like flowers without fragrance.

And finally, lest you get discouraged by your own faults, the Dhammapada gives you this solacing image: the purest lily can spring out of a heap of rubbish by the wayside. That is to say, there is nothing so rotten that it cannot give birth to the purest realisation.

Whatever may be the past, whatever may be the faults committed, whatever the ignorance in which one might have lived, one carries deep within oneself the supreme purity which can translate itself into a wonderful realisation.

The whole point is to think of that, to concentrate on that and not to be concerned with all the difficulties and obstacles and hindrances.

Concentrate exclusively on what you want to be, forget as entirely as possible what you do not want to be.

7 March 1958

The Fool

Long is the night for one who sleeps not; long is the road for one who is weary; long is the cycle of births for the fool who knows not the true law.

If a man cannot find a companion who is his superior or even his equal, he should resolutely follow a solitary path; for no good can come from companionship with a fool.

The fool torments himself by thinking, "This son is mine, this wealth is mine." How can he possess sons and riches, who does not possess himself?

The fool who recognises his foolishness is at least wise in that. But the fool who thinks he is intelligent, is a fool indeed.

Even if the fool serves an intelligent man throughout his life, he will nevertheless remain ignorant of the truth, just as the spoon knows not the taste of the soup.

If an intelligent man serves a wise man, if only for a moment, he will quickly understand the truth, just as the tongue instantly perceives the savour of the soup.

The fools, those who are ignorant, have no worse enemies than themselves; bitter is the fruit they gather from their evil actions.

The evil action which one repents later brings only regrets and the fruit one reaps will be tears and lamentations.

The good action one does not need to repent later brings no regret and the fruit one reaps will be contentment and satisfaction.

As long as the evil action has not borne its fruits, the fool imagines that it is as sweet as honey. But when this action bears its fruits, he reaps only suffering.

Though month after month the fool takes his food with the tip of a blade of Kusa grass,¹ he is not for all that worth a sixteenth part of one who has understood the truth.

An evil action does not yield its fruits immediately, just as milk does not at once turn sour; but like a fire covered with ashes, even so smoulders the evil action.

Whatever vain knowledge a fool may have been able to acquire, it leads him only to his ruin, for it breaks his head and destroys his worthier nature.

The foolish monk thirsts after reputation, and a high rank among the Bhikkhus, after authority in the monastery and veneration from ordinary men.

“Let ordinary men and holy ones esteem highly what I have done; let them obey me!” This is the longing of the fool, whose pride increases more and more.

One path leads to earthly gain and quite another leads to Nirvana. Knowing this, the Bhikkhu, the disciple of the Perfectly Enlightened One, longs no more for honour, but rather cultivates solitude.

¹ Kusa grass is considered sacred in India. Taking one's food with the tip of a blade of Kusa grass symbolises an act of asceticism.

Questions and Answers

This seems to point directly to hypocrites who take up the external forms and appearances of wisdom but in their hearts keep all the desires, ambitions, the need for show, and live to satisfy this ambition and these desires instead of living for the only thing that is worth living for: attainment of the true consciousness, integral self-giving to the Divine, the peace, the light and the delight that come from the true wisdom and self-forgetfulness.

One could easily replace throughout this text the word fool by the word ego. One who lives in his ego, for his ego, in the hope of satisfying his ego is a fool. Unless you transcend ego, unless you reach a state of consciousness in which ego has no reason for existing, you cannot hope to attain the goal.

The ego seems to have been indispensable at one time for the formation of the individual consciousness, but with the ego were born all the obstacles, sufferings, difficulties, all that now appears to us as adverse and anti-divine forces. But these forces themselves were a necessity for attaining an inner purification and the liberation from ego. The ego is at once the result of their action and the cause of their prolongation. When the ego disappears, the adverse forces will also disappear, having no longer any reason for their existence in the world.

With the inner liberation, with a total sincerity and perfect purity, all suffering will disappear, because it will no longer be necessary for the progress of the consciousness towards its final goal.

Wisdom, then, consists in working energetically at the inner transformation so that you may emerge victorious from a struggle which will have borne its fruits but will no longer have any need to exist.

14 March 1958

The Sage

We should seek the company of the sage who shows us our faults, as if he were showing us a hidden treasure; it is best to cultivate relations with such a man because he cannot be harmful to us. He will bring us only good.

One who exhorts us to good and dissuades us from doing evil is appreciated, esteemed by the just man and hated by the unjust.

Do not seek the company or friendship of men of base character, but let us consort with men of worth and let us seek friendship with the best among men.

He who drinks directly from the source of the Teaching lives happy in serenity of mind. The sage delights always in the Teaching imparted by the noble disciples of the Buddha.

Those who build waterways lead the water where they want; those who make arrows straighten them; carpenters shape their wood; the sage controls himself.

No more than a mighty rock can be shaken by the wind, can the sage be moved by praise or blame.

The sage who has steeped himself in the Teaching, becomes perfectly peaceful like a deep lake, calm and clear.

Wherever he may be, the true sage renounces all pleasures. Neither sorrow nor happiness can move him.

Neither for his own sake, nor for the sake of others does the sage desire children, riches or domains. He does not

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aim for his own success by unjust ways. Such a man is virtuous, wise and just.

Few men cross to the other shore. Most men remain and do no more than run up and down along this shore.

But those who live according to the Teaching cross beyond the realm of Death, however difficult may be the passage.

The sage will leave behind the dark ways of existence, but he will follow the way of light. He will leave his home for the homeless life and in solitude will seek the joy which is so difficult to find.

Having renounced all desires and attachments of the senses, the sage will cleanse himself of all the taints of the mind.

One whose mind is well established in all the degrees of knowledge, who, detached from all things, delights in his renunciation, and who has mastered his appetites, he is resplendent, and even in this world he attains Nirvana.

There is a sentence here which is particularly felicitous. It is the very first sentence we have read, "We should seek the company of the sage who shows our faults, as if he were showing us a hidden treasure."

In all Scriptures meant to help mankind to progress, it is always said that you must be very grateful to those who show you your faults and so you must seek their company; but the form used here is particularly felicitous: if a fault is shown to you it is as if a treasure were shown to you; that is to say, each time that you discover in yourself a fault, incapacity, lack of understanding, weakness, insincerity, all that prevents you

from making a progress, it is as if you discovered a wonderful treasure.

Instead of growing sad and telling yourself, “Oh, there is still another defect”, you should, on the contrary, rejoice as if you had made a wonderful acquisition, because you have just caught hold of one of those things that prevented you from progressing. And once you have caught hold of it, pull it out! For those who practise a yogic discipline consider that the moment you know that a thing should not be, you have the power to remove it, discard it, destroy it.

To discover a fault is an acquisition. It is as though a flood of light had come to replace the little speck of obscurity which has just been driven out.

When you follow a yogic discipline, you must not accept this weakness, this baseness, this lack of will, which means that knowledge is not immediately followed by power. To know that a thing should not be and yet continue to allow it to be is such a sign of weakness that it is not accepted in any serious discipline, it is a lack of will that verges on insincerity. You know that a thing should not be and the moment you know it, you are the one who decides that it shall not be. For knowledge and power are essentially the same thing — that is to say, you must not admit in any part of your being this shadow of bad will which is in contradiction to the central will for progress and which makes you impotent, without courage, without strength in the face of an evil that you must destroy.

To sin through ignorance is not a sin; that is part of the general evil in the world as it is, but to sin when you know, that is serious. It means that there is hidden somewhere, like a worm in the fruit, an element of bad will that must be hunted out and destroyed, at any cost, because any weakness on such a point is the source of difficulties that sometimes, later on, become irreparable.

So then the first thing is to be perfectly happy when someone or some circumstance puts you in the conscious presence of a

Questions and Answers

fault in yourself which you did not know. Instead of lamenting, you must rejoice and in this joy must find the strength to get rid of the thing which should not be.

21 March 1958

The Adept

No sorrow exists for one who has completed his journey, who has let fall all cares, who is free in all his parts, who has cast off all bonds.

Those who are heedful strive always and, like swans leaving their lakes, leave one home after another.

Those who amass nothing, who eat moderately, who have perceived the emptiness of all things and who have attained unconditioned liberation, their path is as difficult to trace as that of a bird in the air.

One for whom all desires have passed away and who has perceived the emptiness of all things, who cares little for food, who has attained unconditioned liberation, his path is as difficult to trace as that of a bird in the air.

Even the Gods esteem one whose senses are controlled as horses by the charioteer, one who is purged of all pride and freed from all corruption.

One who fulfils his duty is as immovable as the earth itself. He is as firm as a celestial pillar, pure as an unmuddied lake; and for him the cycle of births is completed.

Calm are the thoughts, the words and the acts of one who has liberated himself by the true knowledge and has achieved a perfect tranquillity.

The greatest among men is he who is not credulous but has the sense of the Uncreated, who has cut all ties, who has destroyed all occasion for rebirth.

Questions and Answers

Whether village or forest, plain or mountain, wherever the adepts may dwell, that place is always delightful.

Delightful are the forests which are shunned by the multitude. There, the adept, who is free from passion, will find happiness, for he seeks not after pleasure.

There is a very interesting sentence here: “He who is not credulous but has the sense of the Uncreated...”

One who is not credulous — all kinds of things can be understood from this word. The first impression is that it refers to one who does not believe in invisible things without having an experience of them, as distinct from people who follow, for example, a particular religion and have faith in dogmas simply because that is what they have been taught. But he “has the sense of the Uncreated”, that is to say, he is in contact with invisible things and knows them as they are, by identity. The Dhammapada has told us, to begin with, that the greatest of men is he who has no faith in what is taught but has a personal experience of things that are not visible, he who is free from all belief and has himself had the experience of invisible things.

Another explanation can also be given: one who is not credulous is he who does not believe in the reality of appearances, in things as we see them, who does not take them for the truth, who knows that these are only misleading appearances and that behind them lies a truth that is to be found and known by personal experience and by identity.

And this makes one reflect on the number of things, the countless number of things that we believe without any personal knowledge, simply because we have been taught that they are like that, or because we are accustomed to think they are like that, or because we are surrounded by people who believe that things are like that. If we look at all the things that we believe and not only believe but assert with an indisputable authority, “This is like this”, “That, but of course it is like that”, “And

this thing, yes, it is so....” In truth, however, we know nothing about it, it is simply because we are in the habit of thinking that they are like that. What are the things that you have experienced personally, with which you have had a direct contact, of which you can at least say with sincerity, “I am convinced that it is like that, because I have experienced it”? Not many.

In reality, if you truly want to have knowledge, you must begin by making a very important study: verify the things that we have been taught, even the most common and the most insignificant. Then you will understand why the text says “the greatest among men”, because I do not think that many have made this experiment.

Just to find out the number of things we believe and assert, simply because it is customary to believe and assert them, is indeed a very interesting discovery.

Now go and look into your thought and consciousness for all the things that you assert without proof. You will see!

28 March 1958

The Thousands

Better than a thousand words devoid of meaning is a single meaningful word which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

Better than a thousand verses devoid of meaning is a single meaningful verse which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

Better than the repetition of a hundred verses devoid of meaning is the repetition of a single verse of the Teaching which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

The greatest conqueror is not he who is victorious over thousands of men in battle, but he who is victorious over himself.

The victory that one wins over oneself is of more value than victory over all the peoples.

No god, no Gandharva,¹ nor Mara nor Brahma² can change that victory to defeat.

If, month after month, for a hundred years one offers sacrifices by the thousand, and if for a single instant one offers homage to a being full of wisdom, that single homage is worth more than all those countless sacrifices.

If for a hundred years a man tends the flame on Agni's altar, and if, for a single instant, he renders homage to a man who has mastered his nature, this brief homage has more value than all his long devotions.

¹ Celestial musician. ² The creator of the universe.

Whatever the sacrifices and oblations a man in this world may offer throughout a whole year in order to acquire merit, that is not worth even a quarter of the homage offered to a just man.

For one who is respectful to his elders, four things increase: long life, beauty, happiness and strength.

A single day spent in good conduct and meditation is worth more than a hundred years spent in immorality and dissipation.

A single day of wisdom and meditation is worth more than a hundred years spent in foolishness and dissipation.

A single day of strength and energy is worth more than a hundred years spent in indolence and inertia.

A single day lived in the perception that all things appear and disappear is worth more than a hundred years spent not knowing that they appear and disappear.

A single day spent in contemplation of the path of immortality is worth more than a hundred years lived in ignorance of the path of immortality.

A single day spent in contemplation of the supreme Truth is worth more than a hundred years lived in ignorance of the supreme Truth.

All kinds of different things are gathered here under the same heading. It is an association of words more than an association of ideas. But the central trend is this, that it is preferable to have one moment of sincerity rather than a long life of apparent devotion and that a psychological and spiritual victory over oneself is more important than all external victories.

Questions and Answers

There is also an interesting reflection, that a victory over oneself is the only victory which is truly safe from the intervention of any god or power of Nature or any instrument of evil. If you have gained self-mastery on one point, that goes beyond the reach of any intervention even from the very highest powers, whether they are gods of the Overmind or any anti-divine powers in the world.

The opening text says that a single word that gives you peace is worth more than thousands of words that have no meaning — this anybody can understand — but it is also said that the word that gives you peace is worth more than thousands of words that can satisfy the mental activity but have no psychological effect on your being.

Indeed, when you have found something which has the power to help you in gaining a victory over your unconsciousness and inertia, you must, till you reach the final result, exhaust all the effects produced by that word or phrase before you look for others.

It is more important to pursue to its end the practice of the effect produced by an idea that one has met somehow, than to try to accumulate in the head a large number of ideas. Ideas may all be very useful in their own time, if they are allowed in at the opportune moment, particularly if you carry to the extreme limit the result of one of those dynamic ideas that are capable of making you win an inner victory. That is to say, one should have for one's chief, if not only aim the practice of what one knows rather than the accumulation in oneself of a knowledge which remains purely theoretical.

So one could sum up: put into practice integrally what you know, only then can you usefully increase your theoretical knowledge.

11 April 1958

Evil

Hasten towards the good, leave behind all evil thoughts, for to do good without enthusiasm is to have a mind which delights in evil.

If one does an evil action, he should not persist in it, he should not delight in it. For full of suffering is the accumulation of evil.

If one does a good action, he should persist in it and take delight in it. Full of happiness is the accumulation of good.

As long as his evil action has not yet ripened, an evil-doer may experience contentment. But when it ripens, the wrong-doer knows unhappiness.

As long as his good action has not yet ripened, one who does good may experience unhappiness. But when it ripens, the good man knows happiness.

Do not treat evil lightly, saying, "That will not touch me." A jar is filled drop by drop; even so the fool fills himself little by little with wickedness.

Do not treat good lightly, saying, "That will not touch me." A jar is filled drop by drop; even so the sage fills himself little by little with goodness.

The merchant who is carrying many precious goods and who has but few companions, avoids dangerous roads; and a man who loves his life is wary of poison. Even so should one act regarding evil.

Questions and Answers

A hand that has no wound can carry poison with impunity; act likewise, for evil cannot touch the righteous man.

If you offend one who is pure, innocent and defenceless, the insult will fall back on you, as if you threw dust against the wind.

Some are reborn here on earth, evil-doers go to the worlds of Niraya,¹ the just go to the heavenly worlds, but those who have freed themselves from all desire attain Nirvana.

Neither in the skies, nor in the depths of the ocean, nor in the rocky caves, nowhere upon earth does there exist a place where a man can find refuge from his evil actions.

Neither in the skies, nor in the depths of the ocean, nor in the rocky caves, nowhere upon earth does there exist a place where a man can hide from death.

People have the habit of dealing lightly with thoughts that come. And the atmosphere is full of thoughts of all kinds which do not in fact belong to anybody in particular, which move perpetually from one person to another, very freely, much too freely, because there are very few people who can keep their thoughts under control.

When you take up the Buddhist discipline to learn how to control your thoughts, you make very interesting discoveries. You try to observe your thoughts. Instead of letting them pass freely, sometimes even letting them enter your head and establish themselves in a quite inopportune way, you look at them, observe them and you realise with stupefaction that in the space of

¹ Hell; the state of suffering.

a few seconds there passes through the head a series of absolutely improbable thoughts that are altogether harmful.

You believe you are so good, so kind, so well disposed and always full of good feelings. You wish no harm to anybody, you wish only good — all that you tell yourself complacently. But if you look at yourself sincerely as you are thinking, you notice that you have in your head a collection of thoughts which are sometimes frightful and of which you were not at all aware.

For example, your reactions when something has not pleased you: how eager you are to send your friends, relatives, acquaintances, everyone, to the devil! How you wish them all kinds of unpleasant things, without even being aware of it! And how you say, “Ah, that will teach him to be like that!” And when you criticise, you say, “He must be made aware of his faults.” And when someone has not acted according to your ideas, you say, “He will be punished for it!” and so on.

You do not know it because you do not look at yourself in the act of thinking. Sometimes you know it, when it becomes a little too strong. But when the thing simply passes through, you hardly notice it — it comes, it enters, it leaves. Then you find out that if you truly want to be pure and wholly on the side of the Truth, then that requires a vigilance, a sincerity, a self-observation, a self-control which are not common. You begin to realise that it is difficult to be truly sincere.

You flatter yourself that you have nothing but good feelings and good intentions and that whatever you do, you do for the sake of what is good — yes, so long as you are conscious and have control, but the moment you are not very attentive, all kinds of things happen within you of which you are not at all conscious and which are not very pretty.

If you want to clean your house thoroughly, you must be vigilant for a long time, for a very long time and especially not believe that you have reached the goal, like that, at one stroke, because one day you happened to decide that you would be on the right side. That is of course a very essential and important

Questions and Answers

point, but it must be followed by a good many other days when you have to keep a strict guard on yourself so as not to belie your resolution.

4 April 1958

Punishment

All tremble when faced with punishment; all fear death. Seeing others as ourselves, do not strike, do not cause another to strike.

All tremble when faced with punishment; life is dear to all. Seeing others as ourselves, do not strike, do not cause another to strike.

Whosoever hurts creatures eager for happiness for the sake of his own happiness, nevertheless will not obtain it after his death.

Whosoever does not hurt creatures eager for happiness for the sake of his own happiness, will obtain it after death.

Never speak harsh words to anyone, for they will be returned to you. Angry words cause suffering and one who utters them will bear them in return.

If you remain as silent as a broken gong, you have already entered Nirvana, for violence no longer abides in you.

As the cowherd, with his stick, drives the herd to pasture, so old age and death drive the life out of all living beings.

The fool does evil without knowing it; he is consumed and tormented by his actions as by a fire.

One who does harm to one who does none, one who offends one who offends not, will soon suffer one of the ten states that follow:

Questions and Answers

He will endure intense pain, he will suffer disastrous losses and terrible injury, serious illness, madness.

Or he will come in conflict with authority, he will be the object of gross calumny, he will lose his near ones or his possessions.

Or else fire will destroy his dwelling-place; and at the time of the dissolution of his body he will be reborn in Hell.

Neither going naked or with matted hair, nor remaining dirty, nor fasting, nor sleeping on the bare ground, nor smearing the body with ashes, nor the practice of ascetic postures, can purify the mortal who has not cast away all doubt.

However richly he is dressed, if a man cultivates tranquillity of mind, if he is calm, resigned, master of himself, pure, if he does no harm to any creature, he is a Brahmin, he is an ascetic, he is a Bhikkhu.

Is there in this world a man beyond reproach that merits no blame, as a thoroughbred needs no blow from the whip?

Like a spirited horse, be quick and eager for the goal. By trust, virtue, energy, meditation, the quest for truth, perfection of knowledge and conduct, by faith destroy in you all suffering.

Those who build waterways lead the water where they want; those who make arrows straighten them; carpenters shape their wood; the sage controls himself.

One has the impression that these things were written for rather

primitive people. The series of calamities that will befall you if you do harm is quite amusing.

It would seem — provided of course that this is an exact record of the words that the Buddha spoke — that he must have changed the terms of his talks according to his audience and if he had to do with rustic people without education, he would speak a very material language with very practical and concrete comparisons so that they might understand him. There is a considerable difference of level in these verses. Some have become very famous, as, for example, the last verse here, where it is said that the artisan shapes his material to achieve what he has to do, and this striking conclusion: the sage controls himself.

Truly one has the impression that human mentality has progressed since that age. Thought has become more complex, psychology more profound, to the extent that these arguments appear almost puerile. But when we mean to practise them, then we realise that we have remained almost on the same level, and that if thought has progressed, practice, far from being better, seems to have become worse. And here there is a childlike simplicity, something rather healthy, an absence of perversion that unfortunately the human race no longer possesses.

There was a moral healthiness in those days which has now completely disappeared. These arguments make you smile, but the practice of what is taught here is much more difficult now than it was at that time. A kind of hypocrisy, pretension, underhand duplicity seems to have taken possession of the human mind and especially its way of being, and men have learnt to deceive themselves in a most pernicious way.

In those times, one could say, “Don’t do harm, you will be punished”; hearts were simple and the mind as well, and one said, “Yes, it is better not to do harm, because I will be punished.” But now, with an ironical smile, you say, “Oh! I shall surely find a way to avoid punishment.”

Mental capacity seems to have grown, mental power seems to have developed, men seem to be much more capable of playing

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with ideas, of having mental command over all principles, but at the same time they have lost the simple and healthy candour of people who lived closer to Nature and knew less how to play with ideas. Thus humanity as a whole seems to have reached a very dangerous turning-point. Those who are trying to find a solution to the general corruption preach a return to the simplicity of yore, but of course that is quite impossible: you cannot go back.

We must go farther on, we must advance, climb greater heights and go beyond the arid search for pleasure and personal welfare, not through fear of punishment, even punishment after death, but through the development of a new sense of beauty, a thirst for truth and light, through understanding that it is only by widening yourself, illumining yourself, setting yourself ablaze with the ardour for progress, that you can find both integral peace and enduring happiness.

One must rise up and widen — rise up... and widen.

18 April 1958

Old Age

Why this joy, this gladness, when the world is forever burning? O you who are enveloped in shadows, why do you not seek the light?

See then this poor decorated form, this mass of corruptible elements, of infirmities and vain desires in which nothing is lasting or stable.

This fragile body is but a nest of misery, of decrepitude and corruption; for life ends in death.

What pleasure is there in contemplating these white bones strewn like gourds in autumn?

In this fortress made of bone and covered with flesh and blood, only pride and jealousy, dissolution and death are established.

Even the gorgeous chariots of kings are worn out in the end. It is the same with this body which at last is worn out with age; but the true Law is never worn out and so one sage can pass it on to another.

The ignorant man grows older like a bullock; his weight increases but not his intelligence.

Many times have I passed in vain through the cycle of births in search of the builder of this house. And how painful is this cycle of births!

At last, I have found you, builder; never again shall you build this house that is my body. All the beams are shattered and the ridge of the roof has crumbled.

Questions and Answers

My liberated mind has attained the extinction of all desires.

Those who have not lived a life of self-control and who, in their youth, have not known how to gather the true riches, perish like aged herons beside a lake with no fish.

Those who have not lived a life of self-control and who, in their youth, have not known how to gather the true riches are like shattered bows; they grieve for their lost strength.

There is one thing certain which is not clearly stated here, but which is at least as important as all the rest. It is this, that there is an old age much more dangerous and much more real than the amassing of years: the incapacity to grow and progress.

As soon as you stop advancing, as soon as you stop progressing, as soon as you cease to better yourself, cease to gain and grow, cease to transform yourself, you truly become old, that is to say, you go downhill towards disintegration.

There are young people who are old and there are old people who are young. If you carry in you this flame for progress and transformation, if you are ready to leave everything behind so that you may advance with an alert step, if you are always open to a new progress, a new improvement, a new transformation, then you are eternally young. But if you sit back satisfied with what has been accomplished, if you have the feeling that you have reached your goal and you have nothing left to do but enjoy the fruit of your efforts, then already more than half your body is in the tomb: it is decrepitude and the true death.

Everything that has been done is always nothing compared with what remains to be done.

Do not look behind. Look ahead, always ahead and go forward always.

25 April 1958

The Ego

If a man holds himself dear, let him guard himself closely. The sage should watch through one of the three vigils of his existence (youth, maturity, or old age).

One should begin by establishing oneself in the right path; then, one will be able to advise others. Thus the sage is above all reproach.

If one puts into practice what he teaches to others, being master of himself, he can very well guide others; for in truth it is difficult to master oneself.

In truth, one is one's own master, for what other master can there be? By mastering oneself, one acquires a mastery which is difficult to achieve.

The evil done by himself, originated by himself, emanating from him, crushes the fool as the diamond crushes a hard gem.

Just as the creeper clings to the Sal tree, even so one entrapped by his own evil actions does to himself the harm his enemy would wish him.

It is so easy to do oneself wrong and harm, but how difficult it is to do what is good and profitable!

The fool who, because of his wrong views, rejects the teachings of the adepts, the Noble Ones and the Just, brings about his own destruction, as the fruit of the bamboo kills the plant.

Questions and Answers

Doing evil, one harms oneself; avoiding evil, one purifies oneself; purity and impurity depend on ourselves; no one can purify another.

No man should neglect his supreme Good to follow another, however great. Knowing clearly what is his best line of conduct, he should not swerve from it.

The question here seems to be more about egoism than ego.

Egoism is a relatively easy thing to correct, because everyone knows what it is. It is easy to discover, easy to correct, if one truly wants to do it and is bent on it.

But the ego is much more difficult to seize, because, in fact, to realise what the ego is one must already be out of it, otherwise one cannot find it out. You are wholly moulded from it, from head to foot, from the outermost to the innermost, from the physical to the spiritual, you are steeped in ego. It is mixed with everything and you are not aware of what it is. You must have already conquered it, come out of it, freed yourself from it, at least partially, at least in some little corner of your being somewhere, in order to realise what the ego is.

The ego is what helps us to individualise ourselves and what prevents us from becoming divine. It is like that. Put that together and you will find the ego. Without the ego, as the world is organised, there would be no individual, and with the ego the world cannot become divine.

It would be logical to conclude, "Well, let us first of all become conscious individuals and then we shall send away the ego and become divine." Only, when we have become conscious individuals, we have grown so accustomed to living with our ego that we are no longer able to discern it and much labour is needed to become aware of its presence.

On the other hand, everyone knows what egoism is. When you want to pull everything towards you and other people do not interest you, that is called egoism; when you put yourself

at the centre of the universe and all things exist only in relation to you, that is egoism. But it is very obvious, one must be blind not to see that one is egoistic. Everybody is a little egoistic, more or less, and at least a certain proportion of egoism is normally acceptable; but even in ordinary life, when one is a little too egoistic, well, one receives knocks on the nose, because, since everyone is egoistic, no one much likes egoism in others.

It is taken for granted, it is part of public morality. Yes, one must be a little bit egoistic, not too much, so it is not conspicuous! On the other hand, nobody speaks of the ego, because nobody knows it. It is such an intimate companion that one does not even recognise its existence; and yet so long as it is there one will never have the divine consciousness.

The ego is what makes one conscious of being separate from others. If there were no ego, you would not perceive that you are a person separate from others. You would have the impression that you are a small part of a whole, a very small part of a very great whole. On the other hand, every one of you is most certainly quite conscious of being a separate person. Well, it is the ego that gives you this impression. As long as you are conscious in this way, it means that you have an ego.

When you begin to be aware that everything is yourself, and that this is only a very small point in the midst of thousands and thousands of other points of the same person that you are everywhere, when you feel that you are yourself in everything and that there is no separation, then you know that you are on the way towards having no more ego.

There even comes a time when it is impossible to conceive oneself and say, "It is not I", for even to express it in this way, to say that the All is you, that you are the All or that you are the Divine or that the Divine is you, proves that something still remains.

There is a moment — this happens in a flash and can hardly stay — when it is the All that thinks, it is the All that knows, it is the All that feels, it is the All that lives. There is not even... not even the impression that... you have reached that point.

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Then it is all right. But until then, there is still a little remnant of ego somewhere; usually it is the part which looks on, the witness that looks on.

So do not assert that you have no more ego. It is not accurate. Say you are on the way towards having no more ego, that is the only correct thing to say.

I do not believe that it has happened to you, has it? — not yet! And yet it is indispensable, if you truly intend to know what the supramental is. If you are a candidate for supermanhood, you must resolve to dispense with your ego, to go beyond it, for as long as you keep it with you, the supermind will be for you something unknown and inaccessible.

But if through effort, through discipline, through progressive mastery, you surmount your ego and go beyond it, even if only in the tiniest part of your being, this acts like the opening of a small window somewhere, and by looking carefully through the window, you will be able to glimpse the supermind. And that is a promise. When you glimpse it, you find it so beautiful that you immediately want to get rid of all the rest... of the ego!

Please note that I am not saying that you must be totally free from all ego in order to have a glimpse of the supramental; for then that would be something almost impossible. No, to be free from ego, just a little bit somewhere, in some corner of your being, even only a little corner of the mind; if it is the mind and the vital, it is well and good, but if by chance — oh! not by chance — if by repeated efforts you have entered into contact with your psychic being, then the door is wide open. Through the psychic you can suddenly have a very clear and beautiful vision of what the supermind is, only a vision, not a realisation. That is the great way out. But even without going so far as this beautiful realisation, the psychic realisation, if you succeed in liberating some part of your mind or your vital, that makes a kind of hole in the door, a keyhole; through this keyhole you have a glimpse, just a little glimpse. And that is already very attractive, very interesting.

2 May 1958

The World

Do not follow the way of evil. Do not cultivate indolence of mind. Do not choose wrong views. Do not be of those who linger in the world.

Arise. Cast off negligence. Follow the teaching of wisdom. The sage knows happiness in this world and the other.

Follow the teaching of wisdom and not that of evil. The sage knows happiness in this world and the other.

One who looks upon the world as a bubble or a mirage, Yama the King of Death cannot find him.

Come, look upon the world as the brightly-coloured chariot of a Raja, which attracts the foolish, but where, in truth, there is nothing attractive.

One who, having been negligent, becomes vigilant, illumines the earth like the moon coming forth from behind the clouds.

One whose good actions efface the evil he has done, illumines the earth like the moon coming forth from behind the clouds.

The world is wrapped in darkness and few are those who find their way, who, like a bird escaping from a net, soar up towards heaven.

The swans take the path of the sun. Those who possess occult powers fly through the air. The sages leave this world after defeating Mara and his army of evil.

Questions and Answers

No evil is impossible to him who transgresses one law of the Doctrine, who utters falsehood and who disdains the higher world.

In truth, misers do not attain to the world of the gods and fools do not know the happiness of giving. But the sage delights in giving and thus knows happiness in the other world.

Rather than ruling the earth, rather than reaching heaven, rather than reigning over the worlds, it is better to enter the upward current.

There are four pieces of advice here which I would like to retain for our meditation. “Do not cultivate indolence of mind.” “Do not choose wrong views” — unfortunately this is something one does all the time. And, “Arise. Cast off negligence.”

The world has been so made — at least up to now, let us hope that it will not be so for much longer — that, spontaneously, a man who is not cultured, when he is brought into contact with ideas, always chooses wrong ideas.

And a child who is not educated always chooses bad company. It is a thing I experience constantly and concretely. If you keep a child in a special atmosphere and if, from a very early age, you instill in him a special atmosphere, a special purity, he has a chance of not making a wrong choice. But a child who is taken from the world as it is and is placed in a society where there are good and bad elements will go straight to those who can spoil him, teach him wrong things, that is to say, towards the worst company.

A man who has no intellectual culture, if you give him some mixed ideas, just at random, to choose from, he will always choose the stupid ones; because, as Sri Aurobindo has told us, this is a world of falsehood, of ignorance and an effort is needed, an aspiration; one must come in contact with one’s inmost being — a conscious and luminous contact — if one is to distinguish the true

from the false, the good influence from the bad. If you let yourself go, you sink into a hole.

Things are like that because what rules the world — oh! let us put it in the past tense, so that it becomes true — what ruled the world was falsehood and ignorance.

In fact, for the moment, it is still like that; one should have no illusions about it. But perhaps with a great effort and great vigilance we shall be able to make it otherwise... soon — the “perhaps” is for “soon”.

Surely it will come one day, but we want it soon, and that is why the last two recommendations please me: “Arise. Cast off negligence.”

9 May 1958

The Awakened One (The Buddha)

He whose victory has never been surpassed nor even equalled—which path can lead to Him, the Pathless, the Awakened One who dwells within the Infinite?

One in whom there is neither greed nor desire, how can he be led astray? Which path can lead to Him, the Pathless, the Awakened One who dwells within the Infinite?

Even the gods envy the sages given to meditation, the Awakened Ones, the Vigilant who live with delight in renunciation and solitude.

It is difficult to attain to human birth. It is difficult to live this mortal life. It is difficult to obtain the good fortune of hearing the True Doctrine. And difficult indeed is the advent of the Awakened Ones.

Abstain from evil; cultivate good and purify your mind. This is the teaching of the Awakened Ones.

Of all ascetic practices patience is the best; of all states the most perfect is Nirvana, say the Awakened Ones. He who harms others is not a monk. He who oppresses others is not a true ascetic.

Neither to offend, nor to do wrong to anyone, to practise discipline according to the Law, to be moderate in eating, to live in seclusion, and to merge oneself in the higher consciousness, this is the teaching of the Awakened Ones.

Even a rain of gold would not be able to quench the thirst of desire, for it is insatiable and the origin of sorrows. This the sage knows.

Even the pleasures of heaven are without savour for the sage. The disciple of the Buddha, of the Perfectly Awakened One, rejoices only in the extinction of all desire.

Impelled by fear, men seek refuge in many places, in the mountains, in the forests, in the groves, in sanctuaries.

But this is not a safe refuge; this is not the supreme refuge. Coming to this refuge does not save a man from all sufferings.

One who takes refuge in the Buddha, in the Dhamma¹ and the Sangha,² with perfect knowledge, perceives the Four Noble Truths:

Suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to cessation of suffering.

In truth, this is the sure refuge, this is the sovereign refuge. To choose this refuge is to be liberated from all suffering.

It is difficult to meet the Perfectly Noble One. Such a being is not born everywhere. And where such a sage is born, those around him live in happiness.

Happy is the birth of the Buddhas, happy the teaching of the true Law. Happy is the harmony of the Sangha, happy the discipline of the United.

¹ The True Doctrine.

² The community; the order of the Great Ones and the order of the monks.

Questions and Answers

One cannot measure the merit of the man who reveres those who are worthy of reverence, whether the Buddha or his disciples, those who are free from all desire and all error, those who have overcome all obstacles and who have crossed beyond suffering and grief.

This concerns the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path that lead to the annihilation of suffering. Here are the details given in the text:

The Four Noble Truths are:

(1) Life — taken in the sense of ordinary life, the life of ignorance and falsehood — is indissolubly linked with suffering: suffering of the body and suffering of the mind.

(2) The cause of suffering is desire, which is caused by ignorance of the nature of separative life.

(3) There is a way to escape from suffering, to put an end to pain.

(4) This liberation is obtained by following the discipline of the Eightfold Path which gradually purifies the mind from the Ignorance. The fourth Truth is called the method of the Eightfold Path.

The Noble Path consists in a training in the following eight stages:

(1) *Correct seeing*. To see things as they are, that is to say, a pure, accurate vision, the best vision.

Three conditions characterise existence: pain, impermanence, the absence of a fixed ego. So the Dhammapada says. But it is not quite that, it is rather the absence of a fixed, durable and separate personality in the psychological aggregate, the lack of a true continuity in the personal consciousness. It is for this reason that, for example, in the ordinary state one cannot remember one's past lives nor have the sense of a conscious continuity through all one's lives.

The first point then is to see correctly, and to see correctly is to see that pain is associated with ordinary life, that all things

are impermanent and that there is no continuity in the personal consciousness.

(2) *Correct intention or desire.* But the same word “desire” should not have been used, because we have just been told that we should not have desire. It is rather “correct aspiration”. The word “desire” should be replaced by “aspiration”.

“To be freed from attachments and to have kind thoughts for everything that exists.” To be constantly in a state of kindness. To wish the best for all, always.

(3) *Correct speech that hurts none.* Never speak uselessly and scrupulously avoid all malevolent speech.

(4) *Correct behaviour — peaceful, honest.* From all points of view, not only materially, but morally, mentally. Mental honesty is one of the most difficult things to achieve.

(5) *Correct way of living. Not to cause harm or danger to any creature.* This is relatively easy to understand. There are people who carry this principle to the extreme, against all common sense. Those who put a handkerchief to their mouths, for example, so as not to swallow germs, who have the path in front of them swept so as not to step on an insect. This seems to me a little excessive, because the whole of life as it is at present is made up of destruction. But if you understand the text correctly, it means that one must avoid all possibility of doing harm, one must not deliberately endanger any creature. You can include here all living creatures and if you extend this care and this kindness to everything that lives in the universe, it will be very favourable to your inner growth.

(6) *Correct effort.* Do not make useless efforts for useless things, rather keep all the energy of your effort to conquer ignorance and free yourself from falsehood. That you can never do too much.

(7) The seventh principle comes to confirm the sixth: *correct vigilance.* You must have an active and vigilant mind. Do not live in a half-somnolence, half-unconsciousness — usually in life you let yourself go, come what may! This is what everyone does. Now and then you wake up and you realise that you have wasted your

Questions and Answers

time; then you make a big effort only to fall back again, a minute later, into indolence. It would be better to have something less vehement but more constant.

(8) And finally, *correct contemplation*. Egoless thought concentrated on the essence of things, on the inmost truth and on the goal to be attained.

How often there is a kind of emptiness in the course of life, an unoccupied moment, a few minutes, sometimes more. And what do you do? Immediately you try to distract yourself, and you invent some foolishness or other to pass your time. That is a common fact. All men, from the youngest to the oldest, spend most of their time in trying not to be bored. Their pet aversion is boredom and the way to escape from boredom is to act foolishly.

Well, there is a better way than that — to remember.

When you have a little time, whether it is one hour or a few minutes, tell yourself, “At last, I have some time to concentrate, to collect myself, to relive the purpose of my life, to offer myself to the True and the Eternal.” If you took care to do this each time you are not harassed by outer circumstances, you would find out that you were advancing very quickly on the path. Instead of wasting your time in chattering, in doing useless things, reading things that lower the consciousness — to choose only the best cases, I am not speaking of other imbecilities which are much more serious — instead of trying to make yourself giddy, to make time, that is already so short, still shorter only to realise at the end of your life that you have lost three-quarters of your chance — then you want to put in double time, but that does not work — it is better to be moderate, balanced, patient, quiet, but never to lose an opportunity that is given to you, that is to say, to utilise for the true purpose the unoccupied moment before you.

When you have nothing to do, you become restless, you run about, you meet friends, you take a walk, to speak only of the best; I am not referring to things that are obviously not to be done. Instead of that, sit down quietly before the sky, before the sea or under trees, whatever is possible (here you have all of them) and

On the Dhammapada

try to realise one of these things — to understand why you live, to learn how you must live, to ponder over what you want to do and what should be done, what is the best way of escaping from the ignorance and falsehood and pain in which you live.

16 May 1958

Happiness

Among those who hate, happy are we to live without hatred. Among men who hate, let us live free from hatred.

Among those who suffer, happy are we to live without suffering. Among men who suffer, let us live free from suffering.

Among those who are full of greed, happy are we to live without greed. Among the greedy, let us live free from greed.

Happy indeed are we who own nothing. We shall feed upon delight like the radiant gods.

Victory engenders enmity, and one who is vanquished lives in distress. The man of peace lives in gladness, disdaining both victory and defeat.

There is no greater fire than lust, no greater misfortune than hatred. There is no greater misery than existence, no bliss greater than the Supreme Peace.

Hunger is the worst malady; existence is the worst calamity. One who has understood this realises that Nirvana is the Supreme Happiness.

Health is the greatest acquisition, contentment the greatest treasure. A faithful friend is the best companion and Nirvana the Supreme Happiness.

Having tasted the sweetness of solitude and the Supreme Peace, a man is liberated from suffering and evil, for he partakes of the sweetness of devotion to the Truth.

It is good to contemplate the Noble Ones; to live near them is an endless happiness. One could be always happy by avoiding the sight of fools.

One who frequents fools is bound to suffer long; the company of fools is as painful as that of enemies. To live in the company of the sages is to share the happiness of one who lives among his kinsmen.

Seek therefore the company of the sage who is steadfast, learned, wise, devoted and noble. Follow the example of such a good and wise being, as the moon follows the path of the stars.

One of these verses is very beautiful. We could translate it like this: “Happy is he who possesses nothing, he will partake of the delight of the radiant gods.” To possess nothing does not at all mean not to make use of anything, not to have anything at one’s disposal. “Happy is he who possesses nothing”: he is someone who has no sense of possession, who can make use of things when they come to him, knowing that they are not his, that they belong to the Supreme, and who, for the same reason, does not regret it when things leave him; he finds it quite natural that the Lord who gave him these things should take them away from him for others to enjoy. Such a man finds equal joy in the use of things as in the absence of things. When you have them at your disposal, you receive them as a gift of Grace and when they leave you, when they have been taken away from you, you live in the joy of destitution. For it is the sense of ownership that makes you cling to things, makes you their slave, otherwise one could live in constant joy and in the ceaseless movement of things that come and go and pass, that bring with them both the sense of fullness when they are there and, when they go, the delight of detachment.

Delight! Delight means to live in the Truth, to live in communion with Eternity, with the true Life, the Light that never fails.

Questions and Answers

Delight means to be free, free with the true Freedom, the Freedom of the constant, invariable union with the Divine Will.

Gods are those that are immortal, who are not bound to the vicissitudes of material life in all its narrowness, pettiness, unreality and falsehood.

Gods are those who are turned to the Light, who live in the Power and the Knowledge; that is what the Buddha means, he does not mean the gods of religion. They are beings who have the divine nature, who may live in human bodies, but free from ignorance and falsehood.

When you no longer possess anything, you can become as vast as the universe.

23 May 1958

Pleasure

One who gives himself entirely to what is unprofitable, who does not give himself to what is profitable, who sacrifices true knowledge for the sake of pleasure, will envy those who have chosen the path of self-knowledge.

Therefore do not seek after pleasure, much less what is unpleasant, for it is painful to be deprived of what is pleasing and equally painful to see what is unpleasant.

Therefore one should hold nothing dear, for the loss of what one loves is painful. No bondage exists for those who have neither love nor hatred.

What is pleasing gives rise to grief; what is pleasing gives rise to fear. One who is freed from what is pleasing, who feels no grief, what has he to fear?

Affection gives rise to grief; affection gives rise to fear. One who is freed from affection, who feels no grief, what has he to fear?

Attachment gives rise to grief; attachment gives rise to fear. One who is freed from attachment, who feels no grief, what has he to fear?

Desire gives rise to grief; desire gives rise to fear. One who is freed from desire, who feels no grief, what has he to fear?

Craving gives rise to grief; craving gives rise to fear. One who is freed from craving, who feels no grief, what has he to fear?

Questions and Answers

One holds dear a man who acts rightly, possesses intuition, who is righteous and knows the Truth, who fulfils his duty.

One who aspires to the ineffable Peace, one whose mind is awakened, whose thoughts are not entangled in the net of desire, that one is said to be “bound upstream” (towards perfection).

Just as, after a long absence, a man returning safely home is received by his kinsmen and friends who welcome him, even so it is with one who acts rightly; when he passes from this world to the other, his own good actions welcome him like a kinsman.

It always seems to me that the reasons usually given for becoming wise are poor reasons: “Don’t do this, it will bring you suffering; don’t do that, it will give birth to fear in you” ... and the consciousness dries up more and more, it hardens, because it is afraid of grief, afraid of pain.

I think it would be better to say that there is a certain state of consciousness — which one can acquire by aspiration and a persistent inner effort — in which joy is unmixed and light shadowless, where all possibility of fear disappears. It is the state in which one does not live for oneself but where whatever one does, whatever one feels, all movements are an offering made to the Supreme, in an absolute trust, freeing oneself of all responsibility for oneself, handing over to Him all this burden which is no longer a burden.

It is an inexpressible joy not to have any responsibility for oneself, no longer to think of oneself. It is so dull and monotonous and insipid to be thinking of oneself, to be worrying about what to do and what not to do, what will be good for you and what will be bad for you, what to shun and what to pursue — oh, how wearisome it is! But when one lives like this, quite open, like a

flower blossoming in the sun before the Supreme Consciousness, the Supreme Wisdom, the Supreme Light, the Supreme Love, which knows all, which can do all, which takes charge of you and you have no more worries — that is the ideal condition.

And why is it not done?

One does not think of it, one forgets to do it, the old habits come back. And above all, behind, hidden somewhere in the unconscious or even in the subconscious, there is this insidious doubt that whispers in your ear: “Oh! if you are not careful, some misfortune will happen to you. If you forget to watch over yourself, you do not know what may happen” — and you are so silly, so silly, so obscure, so stupid that you listen and you begin to pay attention to yourself and everything is ruined.

You have to begin all over again to infuse into your cells a little wisdom, a little common sense and learn once more not to worry.

30 May 1958

Anger

One should cast away anger, one should reject pride, one should break all bonds. One who is not attached to name or form, who possesses nothing, is delivered from suffering.

Whosoever masters rising anger, as one who controls a moving chariot, that one indeed is worthy of being called a good charioteer. Others merely hold the reins.

Oppose anger with serenity, evil with good; conquer a miser by generosity and a liar by the truth.

Speak the truth; do not give way to anger; give the little you possess to one who asks of you; by these three attributes, men can approach the gods.

The sages who are void of violence, who are always in control of their senses, attain that imperishable state where pain is no more.

Those who are always vigilant and who discipline themselves day and night, whose minds are always turned towards Nirvana, will see their impurities disappear for ever.

Not only today but since ancient times, they have always been criticised, those who remain silent, those who speak much and those who speak little. None here below escapes criticism.

There has never been and never will be, nor is there now, one who receives only blame or only praise.

If a man is praised by the sages, who have observed him day after day, for being intelligent, without reproach, endowed with knowledge and virtue, who then would dare to blame him who is as pure as gold? Even the gods and Brahma praise him.

Be on your guard against the wrath of the body. Control your actions, and leaving behind wrong ways of acting, practise perfect conduct in action.

Be on your guard against wrath in speech. Control your words, and leaving behind wrong ways of speaking, practise good conduct in speech.

Be on your guard against wrath of mind. Control your thoughts, and leaving behind wrong ways of thinking, practise good conduct in thought.

The sages whose actions are controlled, whose words are controlled and whose thoughts are controlled, they in truth are perfectly controlled.

I suggest that every one of you should try — oh! not for long, just for one hour a day — to say nothing but the absolutely indispensable words. Not one more, not one less.

Take one hour of your life, the one which is most convenient for you, and during that time observe yourself closely and say only the absolutely indispensable words.

At the outset, the first difficulty will be to know what is absolutely indispensable and what is not. It is already a study in itself and every day you will do better.

Next, you will see that so long as one says nothing, it is not difficult to remain absolutely silent, but as soon as you begin to speak, always or almost always you say two or three or ten or twenty useless words which it was not at all necessary to say.

Questions and Answers

I give you this as an exercise till next Friday. We shall see how you succeed. You may, at the end of the week, on Friday, give me a brief note telling me how far you have succeeded — those who have tried. That's all.

6 June 1958

Impurity

Now you are like a withered leaf; the messengers of Yama await you. It is the eve of your departure, and you have made no provision for your journey!

Quickly make for yourself an island of refuge, strive hard and become wise. When you are cleansed and purified of all impurity, you will enter the heavenly home of the Noble Ones.

Now your days are numbered, you are in the presence of the God of death. You have no resting-place on the road, no provision for the journey.

Quickly make for yourself an island of refuge, strive hard and become wise. When you are cleansed and purified of all impurity, you will be reborn no more, you will no more be subject to decay.

Just as the smith refines the silver, so also, little by little from moment to moment, the wise man purifies himself of his impurities.

When rust appears on iron, the iron itself is corrupted by it. So also, a man's evil actions corrupt him and lead him to his doom.

Lack of repetition impairs the effect of mantras.¹ Neglect impairs the solidity of houses. Indolence impairs the beauty of the body. Lack of attention is the downfall of one who watches.

¹ Words charged with spiritual power.

Questions and Answers

Misconduct is the taint of a woman. Meanness is the taint of one who gives. Wrong-doing is a taint in this world and the other.

The greatest of all taints is ignorance. Cleanse yourselves of that taint alone and you will be free of all taints, O Bhikkhus.

Life is easy for one who is impudent as a crow, malicious, boastful, presumptuous and corrupt.

Life is hard for the modest one who seeks purity, who is detached, unassuming and whose judgment is correct.

Already in this world he is uprooted, the one who destroys life, who lies, who takes what he has not been given, who covets the wife of another and who is addicted to drink.

Know that evil things are difficult to master. Let not cravings and wickedness subject you to endless suffering.

Each one gives according to his faith or his liking; if you are discontented with the food and drink offered by another, you will not achieve concentration by night or by day.

But the one who uproots and destroys in himself the very root of such a feeling of resentment, achieves concentration by night and by day.

There is no fire like the fire of craving, no grip like that of hatred. There is no snare like that of delusion, no torrent like desire.

It is easy to see the faults of others, but difficult to perceive our own shortcomings. We winnow the faults of

others like chaff, but we hide our own like the wily gambler concealing his foul throw.

One who always criticises the faults of others and is irritated by them, far from becoming free of faults, increases his own vices.

There is no track in the sky, no Samana² outside the true path. Man delights in vanity. The Tathagatas³ have overcome these obstacles.

There is no track in the sky, no Samana outside the true path. No conditioned thing can last, but the Buddhas remain for ever immutable.

I have read your notes on the control of speech. Some have tried very seriously. I am happy with the result. I believe it will be good for everyone if you continue.

Someone has written me something which is very true: that when one begins, one has no reason to stop, one begins with one hour a day, but this becomes a kind of necessity, a habit and one continues quite naturally.

If your exercise truly has this result, then it will be an excellent thing.

We can select three things from what I have read this evening. The first is that you must persist in what you do if you want to get a result. The Dhammapada tells us, for example, that if you have a mantra and do not repeat it sufficiently, there is no use in having it and that if you are inattentive, you lose the benefit of vigilance, and that if you do not continue in the good habits that you acquire, they are useless — that is to say, you must persevere. As for example, with the exercise which I asked you to do last

² Ascetic.

³ The Buddhas who, according to tradition, came on earth to reveal the eternal Truth.

Questions and Answers

time; I asked you to do it with the idea that if you form the habit of doing it, that will help you much in overcoming your difficulties.

Already someone has told me, quite rightly, that while practising this half-silence, or at any rate this continence of speech, one achieves quite naturally the mastery of numerous difficulties in one's character and also one avoids a great many frictions and misunderstandings. This is true.

Another point to remember from our reading concerns impurity and the Dhammapada gives the example of bad will and wrong action. Wrong action, says our text, is a taint in this world as well as in others. In the next verse it is said that there is no greater impurity than ignorance, that is to say, ignorance is considered as the essential, the central fault, which urgently needs to be corrected, and what is called ignorance is not simply not knowing things, not having the superficial knowledge of things, it means forgetting the very reason of our existence, the truth that has to be discovered.

There was a third thing?... Yes, you must not cherish the illusion that if you want to follow the straight path, if you are modest, if you seek purity, if you are disinterested, if you want to lead a solitary existence and have a clear judgment, things will become easy.... It is quite the contrary! When you begin to advance towards inner and outer perfection, the difficulties start at the same time.

I have very often heard people saying, "Oh! now that I am trying to be good, everybody seems to be bad to me!" But this is precisely to teach you that one should not be good with an interested motive, one should not be good so that others will be good to you — one must be good for the sake of being good.

It is always the same lesson: one must do as well as one can, the best one can, but without expecting a result, without doing it with a view to the result. Just this attitude, to expect a reward for a good action — to become good because one thinks that this will make life easier — takes away all value from the good action.

You must be good for the love of goodness, you must be just

On the Dhammapada

for the love of justice, you must be pure for the love of purity and you must be disinterested for the love of disinterestedness; then you are sure to advance on the way.

13 June 1958

The Just Man

A man is not just if he judges arbitrarily. The wise man is one who distinguishes the just from the unjust, who judges others in full knowledge according to law and equity; this guardian of the Law is called a just man.

The sage is not the man who speaks most. The man who is compassionate, friendly, fearless, is called a sage.

It is not by much speaking that the Doctrine is upheld; but he who has studied the Doctrine, even a little, and mentally realised it, he alone upholds it. He does not neglect it.

A man is not a Thera¹ because his hair is grey. He is ripe in years but he has aged fruitlessly.

But one who possesses the truth, virtue, non-violence and self-mastery, who is free from all impurity, who is wise, is indeed a Thera.

Neither eloquence nor a beautiful appearance grace a man who is jealous, selfish, deceitful. But one in whom such faults are completely uprooted and destroyed, that wise man is fully graced by them.

As for the man who is undisciplined and untruthful, his shaven head does not make him an ascetic. Full of desire and greed, how can he be a Samana?

He who is purged of all evil, both great and small, can be called a Samana, for he is purified of all evil.

¹ A senior monk.

A man is not a Bhikkhu simply because he takes alms for his food. The observance of vows is not enough to make him a Bhikkhu.

But he who is above both good and evil, who leads a pure life, who walks with understanding in this world, he can be called a Bhikkhu.

One who observes silence does not by that become a sage, if he is ignorant and foolish; but he who can weigh good and evil as in a balance and make his choice, him one can call a sage.

He who by contemplation measures this world and the other, he is a sage.

A man who does harm to living creatures does not become a Noble One. One who practises non-violence towards all creatures is called a Noble One.

It is neither by moral precepts and observances, nor by a wide knowledge, nor by practising meditation, nor by a solitary life, nor by thinking, "I have attained the bliss of liberation which is unknown to those who live in the world", that one can be called a Bhikkhu. Be on your guard, O Bhikkhus, until you have attained the extinction of all desire.

We shall take the last text. It is an interesting one.

"It is neither by moral precepts and observances, nor by a wide knowledge, nor by practising meditation, nor by a solitary life, nor by thinking", that one attains the true bliss; it is by getting rid of all desires. Certainly it is not easy to get rid of all desires, it sometimes needs a whole lifetime. But to tell the truth, it seems to be a very negative way, although at a certain stage of development, it is a discipline which is very useful, even indispensable

Questions and Answers

to practise, if one does not want to deceive oneself. Because at first you begin by getting rid of the major desires, those that are most obvious and trouble you so much that you cannot even have any illusions about them; then come subtler desires that take the form of things that have to be done, that are necessary, even at times of commands from within, and it requires time and much sincerity to discover and overcome them; at last it seems as if you had done away with these wretched desires in the material world, in external things, in the world of feelings, in the emotions and sentiments, in the mental world as regards ideas, and then you find them again in the spiritual world, and there they are far more dangerous, more subtle, more penetrating and much more invisible and covered by such a saintly appearance that one dare not call them desires.

And when one has succeeded in overcoming all that, in discovering, dislodging and getting rid of them, even then one has done only the negative side of the work.

The Buddha said or has been made to say that when one is free from all desire, one necessarily enters into infinite bliss. This bliss may be a little dry and anyway it does not seem to me to be the quickest way.

If at the outset one were to seize the problem bodily, jump into it with courage and determination and, instead of undertaking a long, arduous, painful, disappointing hunt after desires, one gives oneself simply, totally, unconditionally, if one surrenders to the Supreme Reality, to the Supreme Will, to the Supreme Being, putting oneself entirely in His hands, in an upsurge of the whole being and all the elements of the being, without calculating, that would be the swiftest and the most radical way to get rid of the ego. People will say that it is difficult to do it, but at least a warmth is there, an ardour, an enthusiasm, a light, a beauty, an ardent and creative life.

It is true that without desire nothing much remains to sustain the ego and one has the impression that the consciousness becomes so hardened that if the ego crumbles into dust, then something of

one's self also falls into dust and one is ready to enter into a Nirvana which is annihilation pure and simple.

But what we consider here as the true Nirvana is the disappearance of the ego into the splendour of the Supreme. And this way is what I call the positive way, the self-giving that is integral, total, perfect, without reserve, without bargaining.

In the mere fact of not thinking of oneself, not existing for oneself, referring nothing to oneself, thinking only of what is supremely beautiful, luminous, delightful, powerful, compassionate and infinite, there is such a profound delight that nothing can be compared to it.

This is the only thing that deserves... that is worthy of being attempted. All the rest is only marking time.

The difference is between climbing a mountain by going round and round, slowly, laboriously, step by step, for hundreds of years, and spreading invisible wings and soaring straight to the summit.

20 June 1958

The Path

The best of all paths is the Eightfold Path; the best of all truths is the Fourfold Truth; the best of all states is freedom from attachment; the best among men is the One who sees, the Buddha.

Truly, this is the Path; there is no other which leads to purification of vision. Follow this Path and Mara will be confounded.

By following this Path, you put an end to suffering. This Path I have made known, since I learned to remove the thorns (of life).

The effort must come from oneself. The Tathagatas only point out the Path. Those who meditate and tread this Path are delivered from the bondage of Mara.

“All conditioned things are impermanent.” When one has seen that by realisation, he is delivered from sorrow. That is the Path of purity.

“All conditioned things are subject to suffering.” When one has seen that by realisation, he is delivered from sorrow. That is the Path of purity.

“All things are insubstantial.” When one has seen that by realisation, he is delivered from sorrow. That is the Path of purity.

He who though young and strong, does not act when it is time to act, is given to indolence, and his mind is full of vain thoughts; one who is so indolent will not find the Path of wisdom.

Moderation in speech, control of the mind, abstention from evil actions, thus these three modes of action are to be purified first of all, to attain the Path shown by the sages.

From meditation wisdom springs, without meditation wisdom declines. Knowing the two paths of progress and decline, a man should choose the Path which will increase his wisdom.

Cut down all the forest (of desires) and not one tree alone; for from this forest springs fear. Cut down this forest of trees and undergrowth, O Bhikkhus. Be free from desire.

As long as one has not rooted out of oneself entirely the desire of a man for a woman, the mind is captive, as dependent as a suckling on its mother.

Root out self-love, as one plucks with his hand an autumn lotus. Cherish only the Path of the peace of Nirvana that the Sugata¹ has taught us.

Here shall I live in the rainy season; I shall stay there in the winter and elsewhere in the summer. Thus thinks the fool and knows not what may befall him.

And this man who is attached to his children and his cattle, is seized by death and carried off, as a sleeping village is swept away by torrential floods.

Neither children, nor father, nor family can save us. When death seizes us, our kinsmen cannot save us.

¹ The Buddha.

Questions and Answers

Knowing this perfectly, the intelligent man, guided by good conduct, does not delay in taking up the path which leads to Nirvana.

Here are some very useful recommendations: moderation in speech, control of the mind, abstention from evil actions. This is very good.

Here is something radical, but it is also very good: “As long as one has not rooted out of oneself entirely the desire of a man for a woman, the mind is captive, as dependent as a suckling on its mother.”

And finally: “Root out self-love, as one plucks with his hand an autumn lotus.” These are good subjects for meditation.

These recommendations seem to have been meant for people who are just at the beginning of the Path from the intellectual point of view. We can easily imagine a gathering of country people, people with simple minds, to whom one has to say, “Listen carefully, it is no use making plans, for you do not know what will happen to you tomorrow. You are amassing wealth, you are taking your ease among your family, you are making schemes for tomorrow and for the day after, and you are not aware that death is on the watch and that at any moment it can fall on you.”

All the same, there is a slightly more advanced stage of intellectual development in which these things need not be said — one must live them! Live in the consciousness that things are altogether impermanent, never become attached, if you are to be free to progress with the universe and grow according to the eternal rhythm. This one understands. But what is important is to practise it. Here one has the impression that these things were told to people who had never thought of them before and so they had the full power of an active force.

After all, in spite of all appearances, humanity progresses; it has progressed particularly in the mind. There are things that no longer need to be said.... Or else one must go to countries that are at a very primitive stage, and even so... ideas have spread

everywhere, the mental light has spread everywhere and in the most unexpected places one finds instances of receptivity and understanding.

One really has the impression that during the last century a light came and spread upon the earth with the result that certain ideas, which were once idea-forces, new ideas with the power to stir up the consciousness in men, have lost their relevance, they are now old. A new light is at work.

In practice, the progress is not very great, even in some respects perhaps there has been a retrogression, but in the mind, in the understanding, in the intellectual vision of things, there has truly been a great change.

It seems we are marching on the way at an accelerated pace and these things which used to be of the first importance are becoming almost commonplace in the light of new discoveries. Life as it is is bad, disorder is everywhere, suffering is everywhere, confusion is everywhere, chaos is everywhere, ignorance is everywhere — we all know it, don't we? It seems so hackneyed.

But that one can emerge from it through a total realisation, a total transformation, through a new light that will establish order and harmony in things, is a message of hope that has to be given. This is the true, the dynamic message.

A new life must be built.

Then all these difficulties that seemed so unsurmountable — oh! they fall of themselves.

When you can live in light and joy, are you going to cling to shadow and suffering?

27 June 1958

Miscellany

If renouncing the slightest happiness enables him to realise a greater one, the intelligent man should renounce the lesser for the sake of the greater.

If he seeks his own happiness by harming others, bound by hate, he remains the slave of hatred.

To neglect what should be done and to do what should be neglected is to increase in arrogance and negligence.

To be constantly mindful of the true nature of the body, not to seek what is evil, to pursue with perseverance what is good, is to have right understanding; thus, all one's impurity disappears.

Having killed his father (ego), his mother (desire) and the two warrior kings (wrong views), having destroyed the kingdom (of the senses) and all its dependencies, the Brahmin lives free from evil.

Having killed father, mother, the two warrior kings and the tiger (mental hindrances), the Brahmin lives free from evil.

The disciples of Gautama are alert and truly awakened, for, day and night, their attention is turned to the Buddha, the Dhamma¹ and the Sangha.²

The disciples of Gautama are alert and truly awakened, for, day and night, their attention remains fixed on the Doctrine.

¹ The Law; the Teaching.

² The Community.

The disciples of Gautama are alert and truly awakened, for, day and night, their attention remains fixed on the Sangha.

The disciples of Gautama are alert and truly awakened, for, day and night, they remain aware of the true nature of the body.

The disciples of Gautama are alert and truly awakened, for, day and night, they delight in compassion.

The disciples of Gautama are alert and truly awakened, for, day and night, they take pleasure in meditation.

It is hard to renounce the world; it is equally hard to enjoy the world. Difficult and sorrowful is household life. It is painful to be with those who are not our equals and it is painful to wander in the cycle of births. Therefore, do not follow after sorrow nor be a wanderer without a goal.

The man who is full of faith and goodness, who possesses glory and wealth, is revered wherever he goes.

Men of goodness shine afar like the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. Whereas wicked men are no more visible than arrows shot in the night.

The man who eats alone, sleeps alone, walks alone untiring in his self-mastery, will delight in the solitary life of the forests.

Still you should not be mistaken. For I believe all these are images rather than material facts, because it is quite certain that eating alone, sleeping alone, living in the forest all alone is not enough to give you freedom of spirit.

Questions and Answers

It has been noticed that most people who live alone in the forest become friendly with all the animals and plants around them; but it is not at all the fact of being all alone that gives you the power of entering into an inner contemplation and living in communion with the Supreme Truth. Perhaps it is easier, when by force of circumstance you have nothing else to do, but I am not convinced of it. One can always invent occupations and it seems to me, according to my experience of life, that if one succeeds in subduing one's nature in the midst of difficulties, if one endeavours to be all alone within oneself with the eternal Presence, while keeping the same surroundings which the Grace has given us, the realisation which one obtains then is infinitely more true, more profound, more lasting.

To run away from difficulties in order to conquer them is not a solution. It is very attractive. In those who seek the spiritual life, there is something which says, "Oh! to sit down under a tree, all alone, to remain in meditation, not to have the temptation to speak or act, how fine it must be!" It is because there is a very strong formation in this direction, but it is very illusory.

The best meditations are those that one has all of a sudden, because they take possession of you as an imperative necessity. You have no choice but to concentrate, to meditate, to look beyond the appearances. And it is not necessarily in the solitude of the forest that it seizes you, it happens when something in you is ready, when the time has come, when the true need is there, when the Grace is with you.

It seems to me that humanity has made some progress and the true victory must be won in life itself.

You must know how to live alone with the Eternal and Infinite in the midst of all circumstances. You must know how to be free, with the Supreme as your companion, in the midst of all occupations. That is indeed the true victory.

14 July 1958

Niraya (Hell)

One who speaks untruth goes to Hell like one who, when he has done a thing, says: "I did not do it." Both, after death, will share the same fate, for these are men of evil.

Though they wear the yellow robe, those who are dissolute and evil-natured, their evil actions will cause them to be reborn in Hell.

It would be better to swallow a red-hot iron ball than to live on alms while leading a dissolute life.

Four punishments await the unscrupulous man who covets the wife of another: shame, troubled sleep, condemnation and Hell.

So he acquires an evil reputation and an evil birth; brief is the pleasure of the anxious pair, heavy the punishment of the law-giver. Let no man therefore seek the wife of another.

Just as Kusa grass cuts the hand if wrongly handled, so also asceticism wrongly understood leads to Niraya.

A duty carelessly fulfilled, a rule wrongly observed and a virtuous life followed out of fear, none of these will bring good results.

If a thing is to be done, do it with zeal. An ascetic with lax habits will stir up the dust (of the passions).

An evil deed is better left undone, for he who does it will be tormented by it. It is better to do a good deed, for he who does it will not have cause to repent it.

Questions and Answers

As a frontier city is well fortified both within and without, so one should guard oneself, so as not to waste a single moment of wakefulness; for those who lose this opportunity, even if only for a moment, will suffer indeed for it when in Hell.

Those who feel shame when there is no cause for shame, and those who feel no shame when there is cause to be ashamed, these deluded ones are destined to a painful state.

Those who are afraid of what should not be feared, and those who do not fear what is to be feared, these deluded ones are destined to a painful state.

Those who see evil where there is none, and those who do not see it where it is, these deluded ones are destined to a painful state.

Those who recognise evil to be evil, and good to be good, these who have right judgment are bound to enjoy happiness.

As in all these teachings there are always several ways of understanding them. The external way is quite commonplace. In all moral principles, the same thing is always said. This Niraya for example, which some take as a kind of hell where one is punished for one's sins, has also another sense. The true sense of Niraya is that particular kind of atmosphere which one creates around oneself when one acts in contradiction, not with outer moral rules or social principles, but with the inner law of one's being, the particular truth of each one which ought to govern all the movements of our consciousness and all the acts of our body. The inner law, the truth of the being is the divine Presence in every human being, which should be the master and guide of our life.

When you acquire the habit of listening to this inner law,

when you obey it, follow it, try more and more to let it guide your life, you create around you an atmosphere of truth and peace and harmony which naturally reacts upon circumstances and forms, so to say, the atmosphere in which you live. When you are a being of justice, truth, harmony, compassion, understanding, of perfect goodwill, this inner attitude, the more sincere and total it is, the more it reacts upon the external circumstances; not that it necessarily diminishes the difficulties of life, but it gives these difficulties a new meaning and that allows you to face them with a new strength and a new wisdom; whereas the man, the human being who follows his impulses, who obeys his desires, who has no time for scruples, who comes to live in complete cynicism, not caring for the effect that his life has upon others or for the more or less harmful consequences of his acts, creates for himself an atmosphere of ugliness, selfishness, conflict and bad will which necessarily acts more and more upon his consciousness and gives a bitterness to his life that in the end becomes a perpetual torment.

Of course this does not mean that such a man will not succeed in what he undertakes, that he will not be able to possess what he desires; these external advantages disappear only when there is within the inmost being a spark of sincerity which persists and makes him worthy of this misfortune.

If you see a bad man become unlucky and miserable, you must immediately respect him. It means that the flame of inner sincerity is not altogether extinguished and something still reacts to his bad actions.

Finally, that leads us again to the observation that you must never, never judge on appearances and that all the judgments you make from outward circumstances are always, necessarily false judgments.

To have a glimpse of the Truth, one must take at least one step back in one's consciousness, enter a little more deeply into one's being and try to perceive the play of forces behind the appearances and the divine Presence behind the play of forces.

25 July 1958

The Elephant

As the elephant on the battlefield endures the arrow shot from the bow, so also shall I patiently bear insult, for truly there are many of evil mind in the world.

It is a tamed elephant that is led to the battlefield; one whom the Raja rides. The best among men is he who patiently bears insult.

Trained mules are excellent, as also the thoroughbreds of Sindh and the mighty tuskers. Better yet is the man who has brought himself under control.

Not by mounting one of these animals does one attain the unexplored path, but by mastering oneself. By that mastery one attains it.

In the mating season it is difficult to control the mighty elephant Dhanapalako.¹ When he is chained he refuses to eat, he yearns only to be once more a wild elephant of the forest.

When a man is slothful and gluttonous, always sleepy and rolling from side to side like a fat hog in the mud — this fool is compelled to be born over and over again.

Once this mind wandered where it would from one thing to another, according to its pleasure, but now I shall master it completely as the mahout with his goad masters the elephant in rut.

¹ One who guards the treasure.

Delight in vigilance, guard carefully your mind. Lift yourself out of evil as the elephant sunk in a swamp.

If for company you find a prudent friend, who leads a good life, who is intelligent and self-controlled, overcoming all obstacles, do not hesitate to set out with him joyfully and courageously.

And if you do not meet with such a friend, who leads a good life, who is intelligent and self-controlled, then like a king renouncing a kingdom he has conquered, or like a solitary elephant in the forest follow your path alone.

It is better to live alone, for one cannot take a fool as a companion. It is better to live alone and do no evil, carefree, like the elephant in the jungle.

It is good to have friends when need arises. It is good to be satisfied with what one has. It is good, at the hour of death, to have acquired merit. It is good to leave all grief behind you.

In this world it is a joy to respect one's mother; it is a joy to respect one's father; it is a joy to honour the monks; it is a joy to revere the Brahmins.²

It is a joy to live purely throughout one's life. It is a joy to have a steadfast faith. It is a joy to acquire wisdom. It is a joy to abstain from all evil.

The first verse gives some very wise advice: the war elephant who has been well trained does not start running away as soon as he receives an arrow. He continues to advance and bears the pain, with no change in his attitude of heroic resistance. Those who wish

² The holy men; the men of wisdom.

Questions and Answers

to follow the true path will naturally be exposed to the attacks of all forms of bad will, which not only do not understand, but generally hate what they do not understand.

If you are worried, grieved or even discouraged by the malicious stupidities that men say about you, you will not advance far on the way. And such things come to you, not because you are unlucky or because your lot is not a happy one, but because, on the contrary, the divine Consciousness and the divine Grace take your resolution seriously and allow the circumstances to become a touchstone on your way, to see whether your resolution is sincere and whether you are strong enough to face the difficulties.

Therefore, if anyone sneers at you or says something that is not very charitable, the first thing you should do is to look within yourself for whatever weakness or imperfection has allowed such a thing to happen and not to be disconsolate, indignant or aggrieved, because people do not appreciate you at what you think to be your true value; on the contrary, you must be thankful to the divine Grace for having pointed out to you the weakness or imperfection or deformation that you must correct.

Therefore, instead of being unhappy, you can be fully satisfied and derive advantage, a great advantage from the harm that was intended against you.

Besides, if you truly want to follow the path and practise yoga, you must not do it for appreciation or honour, you must do it because it is an imperative need of your being, because you cannot be happy in any other way. Whether people appreciate you or do not appreciate you, it is of absolutely no importance. You may tell yourself beforehand that the further you are from ordinary men, foreign to the ordinary mode of being, the less people will appreciate you, quite naturally, because they will not understand you. And I repeat, it has absolutely no importance.

True sincerity consists in advancing on the way because you cannot do otherwise, to consecrate yourself to the divine life

On the Dhammapada

because you cannot do otherwise, to seek to transform your being and come out into the light because you cannot do otherwise, because it is the purpose of your life.

When it is like that you may be sure that you are on the right path.

1 August 1958

Craving

The craving of a heedless man grows like the Maluva creeper. Like a monkey seeking fruits in the forest, he leaps from life to life.

For one who in the world is overcome by the craving that clings, his miseries increase like Birana grass after the rains.

For one who in this world can overcome this craving that clings and is so difficult to master, his sorrows fall away like water from a lotus leaf.

To all who are gathered here, I say for your welfare: pull out the roots of your craving, as you uproot Birana grass. Do not let Mara crush you again and again as a flood crushes a reed.

As a tree, though felled, springs up once more if the roots remain intact, even so sorrow will return again and again until all craving is rooted out.

The misguided man, who cannot resist the thirty-six strong currents of craving, is swept away by the flood of his eagerness for pleasure.

Everywhere these currents flow and the creeper (of craving) springs up and increases. Wherever you see it springing up, cut out its roots with the force of wisdom.

Allowing their minds to be attracted by the enjoyment of transient objects, men who crave pleasure become a prey to birth and to decay.

*Beset by craving, men run around like a hare in a trap.
Bound by the chains of attachment, they come again and
again to sorrow.*

*Beset by craving, men run around like a hare in a trap.
Therefore, O Bhikkhu, desiring deliverance from pas-
sion, destroy your craving.*

*One who, delivered from craving, yet runs back to it, lo,
he is like a freed man who returns to bondage.*

*What the wise call a strong bond is not made of iron,
wood or rope; but the craving for jewels and ornaments,
for wife and children, is a far stronger bond.*

*The wise say that it pulls you downward, and though it
seems to be loose, it is hard to be rid of. This too the
wise cut off; renouncing the pleasures of the senses, free
from craving, they take to the homeless life.*

*Those who are bound by their passions are drawn back
into the stream, like a spider caught in his own web.
This too the wise cut off; renouncing the pleasures of
the senses, free from craving, they take to the homeless
life.*

*Be free from the past, be free from the future, be free
from the present. Cross over to the other shore of exis-
tence; when the mind is wholly delivered, you shall come
no more to birth and death.*

*One who is troubled by evil thoughts, who is controlled
by his passions, who seeks only pleasure, his craving
grows steadily; he makes his bonds strong indeed.*

*One who delights in subduing evil thoughts, who is vig-
ilant and can distinguish impurities, he will put an end*

Questions and Answers

to his cravings, he shall break the bonds of Mara.

He who has reached the goal, who is without fear and free from craving and impurity, he has plucked out the thorns of existence; this is his last incarnation.

One who is free from craving, unattached, who knows the words and their meanings, who knows the arrangement of the texts in their sequence, he indeed has put on his last body. He alone is called "The Man of Great Wisdom."

I have vanquished all, I know all; unconditioned, all-renouncing, delivered by the extinction of craving, having understood all by myself, whom shall I call my teacher?

The gift of Truth excels all gifts; the savour of Truth excels all savours; delight in Truth excels all delights; deliverance from craving overcomes all suffering.

Riches ruin the fool, but not one who seeks the other shore. By craving for riches, the fool ruins himself and others with him.

Weeds are the bane of the fields; passion the bane of mankind. Therefore whatever is given to those freed from passions yields abundant fruit.

Weeds are the bane of the fields; hatred the bane of mankind. Therefore whatever is given to those freed from hatred yields abundant fruit.

Weeds are the bane of the fields; delusion the bane of mankind. Therefore whatever is given to those freed from delusion yields abundant fruit.

On the Dhammapada

Weeds are the bane of the fields; desires the bane of mankind. Therefore whatever is given to those freed from desires yields abundant fruit.

We shall keep the last one to meditate on.

8 August 1958

The Bhikkhu

To control the eye is good; to control the ear is good; to control the nose and the tongue is good.

It is good to control one's actions, words, mind. Control in all things is good. The Bhikkhu who controls himself entirely is delivered from all suffering.

The man who is master over his hands, his feet and his tongue, who controls himself wholly, who delights in meditation, who is calm and leads a solitary life, can be called a Bhikkhu.

The Bhikkhu who is master over his tongue and is moderate in speech, who is modest, who luminously interprets the Doctrine, in truth his words are as sweet as honey.

The Bhikkhu who lives by the Doctrine, who delights in the Doctrine, who meditates on the Doctrine, who knows the Doctrine thoroughly, surely cannot fall away from the Doctrine.

The Bhikkhu should not treat his own progress (in wisdom and goodness) lightly, nor envy the progress of others; for the Bhikkhu who is envious cannot achieve concentration.

Even if the progress he has made is slight, the Bhikkhu should not despise it; if his life is pure and his effort persevering, the gods themselves shall praise him for it.

One who is not attached to name and form, who does not think, "This belongs to me", and who does not

grieve over what does not exist, he, in truth, is called a Bhikkhu.

The Bhikkhu who lives a life of loving kindness and who is filled with faith in the teaching of the Enlightened One, that Bhikkhu will attain the peace of Nirvana, the supreme bliss from which every conditioned element has vanished.

Empty this boat, O Bhikkhu; once lightened, the boat of your body will sail more lightly and having rejected desire and hatred you shall enter Nirvana.

Break the five bonds (belief in the ego, doubt, belief in vain rites and ceremonies, craving and bad will). Renounce these five other bonds (the desire to live in the world of forms, the desire to live in the subtle world, pride, restlessness and ignorance). Cultivate these five (faith, energy, mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom). The Bhikkhu who is thus five times free is said to be "he who has crossed over the flood".

Meditate, O Bhikkhus, do not be negligent. Your minds should not turn towards the pleasures of the senses; for if by negligence you swallowed a red-hot iron ball, when you felt the burning you would lament, crying, "Oh, how painful it is!"

For one without knowledge there is no meditation; without meditation there is no knowledge. One in whom there is both meditation and knowledge is near to Nirvana.

The Bhikkhu who has entered the abode of emptiness, the Bhikkhu of serene mind, enjoys delight beyond the human, in the clear vision of the Doctrine.

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Each time that he concentrates on the appearance and disappearance of all conditioned things, he enjoys the happiness and the delight of those who have attained immortality.

These things are for the wise Bhikkhu the very basis of the religious life: mastery of the senses, contentment, conduct according to the code of discipline, association with noble friends who lead a life of constant purity.

The Bhikkhu should be cordial, kind and polite; thus in the fullness of his joy, he will put an end to suffering.

Just as the jasmine sheds its faded petals, so also the Bhikkhu sheds desire and hatred.

Calm in action, calm in speech, calm in mind, serene, emptied of all earthly appetites, this Bhikkhu is called "The Serene One".

Let him arouse himself, let him examine himself; thus self-guarded and vigilant, the Bhikkhu will live in happiness.

In truth, one is one's own protector, one's own refuge. Know therefore how to control yourself as the horse-dealer controls a noble steed.

Filled with gladness and faith by the teaching of the Buddha, the Bhikkhu attains the state of perfect peace, cessation of all compounded existence.

The young Bhikkhu who consecrates himself to the Teaching of the Enlightened One, illumines this world like the moon coming forth from behind the clouds.

On the Dhammapada

One piece of advice given here is that one should always be kind. It should not be mistaken for the sort of advice people normally give. It says something interesting, even very interesting. My comment is: Always be kind and you will be free from suffering, always be contented and happy, and you will radiate your quiet happiness.

It is particularly noticeable that all the digestive functions are extremely sensitive to an attitude that is critical, bitter, full of ill-will, to a sour judgment. Nothing disturbs the functioning of the digestion more than that. And it is a vicious circle: the more the digestive function is disturbed, the more unkind you become, critical, dissatisfied with life and things and people. So you can't find any way out. And there is only one cure: to deliberately drop this attitude, to absolutely forbid yourself to have it and to impose upon yourself, by constant self-control, a deliberate attitude of all-comprehending kindness. Just try and you will see that you feel much better.

22 August 1958

The Brahmin

Strive, O Brahmin! Seal up the current (of craving), cast away all pleasures of the senses. Knowing how to uproot the elements of existence you shall know the Uncreated.

When the Brahmin has attained the summit of the two paths (concentration and insight), all bonds fall away and he possesses the Knowledge.

One for whom neither the inner nor the outer exist, neither one nor the other, who is free from fear and bondage, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who is given to meditation and is freed of impurities, who is without stain, who has fulfilled his duty, who has attained the highest goal, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

By day the sun shines; by night the moon. In his armour the warrior shines; in meditation the Brahmin shines. Day and night, without ceasing, the Buddha is radiant.

The man who has rejected evil is a Brahmin. One whose behaviour is disciplined is a monk; an ascetic is one who is purged of impurities.

One should not strike a Brahmin, and the Brahmin should not strike back. Shame on one who strikes a Brahmin. Shame on the Brahmin who strikes back.

For a Brahmin there is nothing better than to restrain the mind from the pleasures of life. As he removes bad intentions, so he appeases his sufferings.

One who does no evil by act, word or thought, the man who is restrained in these three, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

Whosoever teaches you the Doctrine of the Perfectly Enlightened One, render him homage and venerate him as the Brahmin does the sacred fire.

Neither by matted hair, nor ancestry, nor by birth does one become a Brahmin. One in whom abide truth and righteousness, he is pure, he is a true Brahmin.

What value has your matted hair, O foolish man? What value has the antelope skin you wear? Within you lies a jungle of passions, you have only the appearance of purity.

The man dressed in cast-off robes, who is emaciated, whose veins stand out on his body, who meditates alone in the forest, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

But I do not call him a Brahmin, although he is of brahmin origin or born of a brahmin mother, he who is rich and arrogant. He who possesses nothing, who is attached to nothing, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He who has broken all bonds, who no longer fears anything, who has overcome all ties, who is liberated, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who little by little has broken the thong (of mind) and the straps (of attachment), who has cut the chain (of doubt) with its links (of evil tendencies) and who has rejected the yoke (of ignorance), who is enlightened, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

Questions and Answers

He who is without resentment, who bears reproaches, blows and chains, whose patience is his true strength, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He who is free from anger, who is faithful to his faith, good and without craving, who has mastered himself and taken a body for the last time, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He who is no more attached to the pleasures of the senses than a drop of water to the lotus leaf, or a mustard seed to the point of a needle, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He who, in this life, has realised the cessation of suffering, who has laid down the burden and has liberated himself (from the yoke of attachment), him I consider to be a Brahmin.

The intelligent man, gifted with profound wisdom, discerning the good and the evil path, who has attained the supreme goal, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who seeks the company neither of householders nor of monks, who has no home and few needs, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who does no harm to any creature, whether strong or weak, who does not kill nor cause to be killed, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

Friendly amid the unfriendly, calm amid the violent, unselfish amid the selfish, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He from whom passion and hatred, pride and pretence have fallen away, as a mustard seed falls from the point of a needle, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who speaks only words that are sweet, instructive, true, and who offends no one, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who in this world takes nothing but what he is given, whether it be little or much, short or long, good or bad, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who has no more desires in this world or the other, who has no more craving, who is free, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One in whom desire exists no more, one who has attained the perfection of knowledge, who has cast away all doubt and who has sounded the depths of immortality, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who in this world has broken all ties (of good and evil) and who is delivered from grief, from taints and impurities, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who, like the moon, is spotless, pure, clear, serene, from whom the thirst of earthly desires has vanished, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who has escaped from the cycle of births, this muddy path, this thorny road, and who has attained the other shore, is given to meditation, void of desire, free from doubt, detached from all things and at peace, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One in whom all passion is destroyed and who, renouncing worldly pleasures, has left the household life and taken to the homeless life, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

Questions and Answers

He in whom all craving is dead and who, renouncing worldly pleasures, has left the household life, who has quenched the thirst of becoming, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who has rejected all earthly ties and has gone beyond all heavenly ties, who is delivered from all ties, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who has put aside liking and disliking, who is indifferent, who is freed from all attachment and all fetters, who has conquered all the worlds, this hero I consider to be a Brahmin.

He who possesses the perfect knowledge of the birth and death of all beings and who is freed from all ties, he is a Blessed One, an Awakened One, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He whose future state is unknown to the gods, the demigods and mortals, who is without desire and without impurity, who has become an adept, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

He who no longer possesses anything, neither past nor present nor future, who owns nothing, who no longer clings to anything, that one I consider to be a Brahmin.

The Noble, the Excellent, the Hero, the great Sage, the Victor, the Impassive, the Pure, the Enlightened, him I consider to be a Brahmin.

One who knows his previous lives, one who perceives the heavens and the hells, who has come to the end of births, who has attained perfect vision, the Sage accomplished

in all accomplishments, him in truth I consider to be a Brahmin.

Such is the conclusion of the Dhammapada and if we have put into practice — to use its image — only a mustard seed of all that has been taught to us, well, we have not wasted our time.

There is one thing which is not spoken of here, in the Dhammapada: a supreme disinterestedness and a supreme liberation is to follow the discipline of self-perfection, the march of progress, not with a precise end in view as described here, the liberation of Nirvana, but because this march of progress is the profound law and the purpose of earthly life, the truth of universal existence and because you put yourself in harmony with it, spontaneously, whatever the result may be.

There is a deep trust in the divine Grace, a total surrender to the divine Will, an integral adhesion to the divine Plan which makes one do the thing to be done without concern for the result. That is the perfect liberation.

That is truly the abolition of suffering. The consciousness is filled with an unchanging delight and each step you take reveals a marvel of splendour.

We are grateful to the Buddha for what he has brought for human progress and, as I told you at the beginning, we shall try to realise a little of all the beautiful things he has taught us, but we shall leave the goal and the result of our endeavour to the Supreme Wisdom that surpasses all understanding.

5 September 1958

Appendix
to
Questions and Answers 1929

Sri Aurobindo's explanations of certain phrases
and passages in *Questions and Answers 1929*

Appendix to Questions and Answers 1929

The Mother asks: “What do you want the Yoga for? To get power?”¹ Does “power” here mean the power to communicate one’s own experience to others? What does it precisely mean?

Power is a general term — it is not confined to a power to communicate. The most usual form of power is control over things, persons, events, forces.

The Mother says: “What is required is concentration — concentration upon the Divine with a view to an integral and absolute consecration to its Will and Purpose.”² Is its Will different from its Purpose?

The two words have not the same meaning. Purpose means the intention, the object in view towards which the Divine is working. Will is a wider term than that.

“Concentrate in the heart.”³ What is concentration? What is meditation?

Concentration means gathering of the consciousness into one centre and fixing it in one object or in one idea or in one condition. Meditation is a general term which can include many kinds of inner activity.

¹ *Questions and Answers 1929*, page 1. The page number in this and the following footnotes refers to the present volume.

² Page 1. ³ Page 1.

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“A fire is burning there.... It is the divinity in you — your true being. Hear its voice, follow its dictates.”⁴

I have never seen this fire in me. Yet I feel I know the divinity in me. I feel I hear its voice and I try my utmost to follow its dictates. Should I doubt my feeling?

No, what you feel is probably the intimation from the psychic being through the mind. To be directly conscious of the psychic fire, one must have the subtle vision and subtle sense active or else the direct action of the psychic acting as a manifest power in the consciousness.

“We have all met in previous lives.”⁵

Who precisely are “we”? Do both of you remember me? Did I often serve you for this work in the past?

It is a general principle announced which covers all who are called to the work. At the time the Mother was seeing the past (or part of it) of those to whom she spoke and that is why she said this. At present we are too much occupied with the crucial work in the physical consciousness to go into these things. Moreover we find that it encouraged a sort of vital romanticism in the Sadhaks which made them attach more importance to these things than to the hard work of Sadhana, so we have stopped speaking of past lives and personalities.

“There are two paths of Yoga, one of tapasyā (discipline) and the other of surrender.”⁶

Once you interpreted my vision as Agni, the fire of purification and tapasyā producing the Sun of Truth. What path do I follow? What place has tapasyā in the path of surrender? Can one do absolutely without tapasyā in the path of surrender?

⁴ Page 1. ⁵ Page 3. ⁶ Page 4.

There is a *tapasyā* that takes place automatically as the result of surrender and there is a discipline that one carries out by one's own unaided effort — it is the latter that is meant in the “two paths of Yoga”. But Agni as the fire of *tapasyā* can burn in either case.

*The Mother says that the first effect of Yoga is to take away the mental control so that the ideas and desires which were so long checked become surprisingly prominent and create difficulties.*⁷

They were not prominent because they were getting some satisfaction or at least the vital generally was getting indulged in one way or another. When they are no longer indulged then they become obstreperous. But they are not new forces created by the Yoga — they were there all the time.

What is meant by the mental control being removed is that the mental simply kept them in check but could not remove them. So in Yoga the mental has to be replaced by the psychic or spiritual self-control which could do what the vital cannot, only many Sadhaks do not make this exchange in time and withdraw the mental control merely.

*“The strength of such impulses as those of sex lies usually in the fact that people take too much notice of them.”*⁸
What are the other impulses referred to?

It refers to strong vital impulses.

*“The whole world is full of the poison. You take it in with every breath.”*⁹
How long is a Sadhak subject to this fear of catching contagion? I feel I won't catch such a contagion now. Is my feeling trustworthy?

⁷ Page 5. ⁸ Page 5. ⁹ Page 6.

Questions and Answers

I don't know that it is. One has to go very far on the path before one is so secure as that.

The Mother says: "One who dances and jumps and screams has the feeling that he is somehow very unusual in his excitement; and his vital nature takes great pleasure in that."¹⁰ Does she mean that one should be usual instead of unusual in one's excitement during spiritual experience?

The Mother did not mean that one must be usual in one's excitement at all — she meant that the man is not only excited but also wants to be unusual (extraordinary) in his excitement. The excitement itself is bad and the desire to seem extraordinary is worse.

*"But to those who possess the necessary basis and foundation we say, on the contrary, 'aspire and draw.'"¹¹
Does this capacity to aspire and draw indicate a great advance already made?*

No. It is a comparatively elementary stage.

How can one distinguish between a dream of deeper origin and a vision?¹²

There is no criterion, but one can easily distinguish if one is in the inward condition, not sleep, in which most visions take place, by the nature of the impression made. A vision in dream is more difficult to distinguish from a vivid dream-experience but one gets to feel the difference.

Sometimes one remembers the dreams, sometimes one does not.¹³ Why is it so?

¹⁰ Page 11. ¹¹ Page 11. ¹² Pages 13-14. ¹³ Page 14.

It depends on the connection between the two states of consciousness at the time of waking. Usually there is a turn over of the consciousness in which the dream-state disappears more or less abruptly, effacing the fugitive impression made by the dream events (or rather their transcription) on the physical sheath. If the waking is more composed (less abrupt) or, if the impression is very strong, then the memory remains at least of the last dream. In the last case one may remember the dream for a long time, but usually after getting up the dream memories fade away. Those who want to remember their dreams sometimes make a practice of lying quiet and tracing backwards, recovering the dreams one by one. When the dream-state is very light, one can remember more dreams than when it is heavy.

“Spiritual experience means the contact with the Divine in oneself (or without, which comes to the same thing in that domain).”¹⁴

What is meant by the Divine “without”? Does it mean the cosmic Divine or the transcendental or both?

It means the Divine seen outside in things, beings, events etc., etc.

Was Jeanne d’Arc’s nature transformed even a little because of her relation with the two Archangels, the two beings of the Overmind?¹⁵

I don’t see how the question of transformation comes in. Jeanne d’Arc was not practising Yoga or seeking transformation.

“You have no longer anything that you can call your own; you feel everything as coming from the Divine, and you have to offer it back to its source. When you can realise that, then even the smallest thing to which

¹⁴ Page 17. ¹⁵ Pages 17-18.

Questions and Answers

*you do not usually pay much attention or care, ceases to be trivial and insignificant; it becomes full of meaning and it opens up a vast horizon beyond.*¹⁶

Is this as elementary a stage as the stage of “aspire and draw” ?

Not so elementary.

*What does Mother mean by the sentence: “When you eat, you must feel that it is the Divine who is eating through you”?*¹⁷

It means an offering of the food not to the ego or desire but to the Divine, who is behind all action.

*“But if we want the Divine to reign here we must give all we have and are and do here to the Divine.”*¹⁸

If one does this completely has he anything more to do?

No. But it is not easy to do it completely.

*The Mother says: “Même ceux qui ont la volonté de s’enfuir, quand ils arrivent de l’autre côté, peuvent trouver que la fuite ne sert pas à grand-chose après tout.”*¹⁹
What does “arrivent de l’autre côté” mean in this sentence? Does it mean “when they come into this world” or “when they go into the world of silence which they realised”?

¹⁶ Page 23. ¹⁷ Page 23-24. ¹⁸ Page 25.

¹⁹ See *Entretiens* 1929, the French translation of *Questions and Answers* 1929. The original English (page 25 of the present volume) is: “And as for those who have the will of running away, even they when they go over to the other side, may find the flight was not of much use after all.”

No — “arrivent de l’autre côté” simply means “when they die”. What Mother intended was that when they actually arrive at their Nirvana they find it is not the ultimate solution or largest realisation of the Supreme and they must eventually come back and have their share of the world action to reach that largest realisation.

How can we recognise who gives all he has and is and does to the Divine?

You can’t, unless you have the inner vision.

“For there is nothing in the world which has not its ultimate truth and support in the Divine.”²⁰

To know this perfectly by experience is to have a very great attainment, perhaps the final attainment; am I right?

Yes.

“Obviously, what has happened had to happen; it would not have been, if it had not been intended.”²¹

Then, what is the place of repentance in man’s life? Has it any place in the life of a Sadhak?

The place of repentance is in its effect for the future — if it induces the nature to turn from the state of things that brought about the happening. For the Sadhak however it is not repentance but recognition of a wrong movement and the necessity of its not recurring that is needed.

“You are tied to the chain of Karma, and there, in that chain, whatever happens is rigorously the consequence of what has been done before.”²²

²⁰ Page 27. ²¹ Pages 27-28. ²² Page 30.

Questions and Answers

Does “before” mean all the past lives, beginning from the very first up to this one?

That is taking things in the mass. In a metaphysical sense whatever happens is the consequence of all that has gone before up to the moment of the action. Practically particular consequences have particular antecedents in the past and it is these that are said to determine it.

The Mother has said: “En fait, la mort a été attachée à toute vie sur terre.”²³ The words “En fait” and “attachée” tend to give the impression that after all death is inevitable. But the preceding sentence — “Si cette croyance pouvait être rejetée, d’abord de la mentalité consciente... la mort ne serait plus inévitable”²⁴ — brings in an ambiguity because it does not make death so inevitable; it introduces a condition — an “if” — by which it could be avoided. But the categoricity of the sentence with “En fait” rather dilutes one’s expectation of a material immortality. Moreover, the “if” in the other sentence is too formidable to be satisfied.

There is no ambiguity that I can see. “En fait” and “attachée” do not convey any sense of inevitability. “En fait” means simply that in fact, actually, as things are at present all life (on earth) has death attached to it as its end; but it does not in the least convey the idea that it can never be otherwise or that this is the unalterable law of all existence. It is at present a fact for certain reasons which are stated, — due to certain mental and physical circumstances — if these are changed, death is not inevitable any longer. Obviously the alteration can only come “if” certain conditions are satisfied, — all progress and change by evolution depends upon an “if” which

²³ See *Entretiens* 1929. The original English (page 36) is: “Death as a fact has been attached to all life upon earth.”

²⁴ Page 36: “If this belief could be cast out first from the conscious mind... death would no longer be inevitable.”

gets satisfied. If the animal mind had not been pushed to develop speech and reason, mental man would never have come into existence, — but the “if”, — a stupendous and formidable one, was satisfied. So with the “ifs” that condition a farther progress.

“Many people would tell you wonderful tales of how the world was built and how it will proceed in the future, how and where you were born in the past and what you will be hereafter, the lives you have lived and the lives you will still live. All this has nothing to do with spiritual life.”²⁵

Is what such people say a complete humbug? Is there a process other than the spiritual by which one can know all these things?

Often it is, but even if it is correct, it has nothing spiritual in it. Many mediums, clairvoyants or people with a special faculty, tell you these things. That faculty is no more spiritual than the capacity to build a bridge or to cook a nice dish or to solve a mathematical problem. There are intellectual capacities, there are occult capacities — that is all.

“They [vampires] are not human; there is only a human form or appearance.... Their method is to try first to cast their influence upon a man; then they enter slowly into his atmosphere and in the end may get complete possession of him, driving out entirely the real human soul and personality.”²⁶

X has married a girl who, the Mother has said, is vampire-like to some extent. Is he then under all these risks? What precautions should he take? Shall I warn him?

First of all what is meant is not that the vampire or vital being even

²⁵ Page 40. ²⁶ Page 42.

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in possession of a human body tries to possess yet another human being. All that is the description of how a disembodied (vampire) vital being takes possession of a human body without being born into it in the ordinary way — for that is their desire, to possess a human body but not by the way of birth. Once thus human, the danger they are for others is that they feed on the vitality of those who are in contact with them — that is all.

Secondly in this case, Mother only said vampire-like to some extent. That does not mean that she is one of these beings, but has to some extent the habit of feeding on the vitality of others. There is no need to say anything to X. It would only disturb him and not help in the least.

The Mother speaks of the power of thoughts and gives the example that if “you have a keen desire for a certain person to come and that, along with this vital impulse of desire, a strong imagination accompanies the mental formation you have made.... And if there is a sufficient power of will in your thought-form, if it is a well-built formation, it will arrive at its own realisation.”²⁷

In the example given, suppose there is no strong desire in the vital but only thoughts or vague imaginations in the mind, would that go and induce the person to come?

It might; especially if that person were himself desirous of coming, it could give the decisive push. But in most cases desire or will behind the thought-force would be necessary.

The Mother says that depression or discouragement cuts holes in the nervous envelope and makes hostile attacks more easy.²⁸ In one sense this means that a man with goodwill should not discourage anyone’s wrong ideas,

²⁷ Pages 50-51. ²⁸ Page 89.

impulses or movements. But would this not be against the principles in ordinary life as well as in Sadhana? There is the way of keeping silent when dealing with such people, but even that sometimes hurts them more than a point-blank discouragement.

Would the bad effects of depression and discouragement indicated by the Mother happen in ordinary life also?

The knowledge about the bad effect of depressions is meant for the Sadhak to learn to avoid these things. He cannot expect people to flatter his failures or mistakes or indulge his foibles merely because he has the self-habit of indulging in depression and hurting his nervous envelope if that is done. To keep himself free from depression is his business, not that of others. For instance some people have the habit of getting into depression if the Mother does not comply with their desires — it does not follow that the Mother must comply with their desires in order to keep them jolly — they must learn to get rid of this habit of mind. So with people's wish of encouragement or praise for all they do. One can be silent or non-intervening, but if even that depresses them, it is their own fault and nobody else's.

Of course, it is the same in ordinary life — depression is always hurtful. But in Sadhana it is more serious because it becomes a strong obstacle to the smooth and rapid progress towards the goal.

Note on the Texts

Questions and Answers 1929. This collection of fifteen conversations of 1929 was first published in 1931 for private circulation under the title *Conversations of the Mother*. The conversations were first made available to the public in 1940 as the main part of the book *Words of the Mother*. This book was reprinted in 1943, 1946 and 1949. The 1929 conversations appeared separately in 1956 under the title *Conversations*. That book was reprinted in 1961, 1966, 1971, 1973 and 1982. In 1989 it was printed together with the Mother's conversations of 1930–1931 under the title *Conversations 1929, 1930–1931*; a second impression of that book was issued in 1997.

The conversations of 1929 were also published in 1977 as the first part of *Questions and Answers*, Volume 3 of the Collected Works of the Mother (first edition); in that volume the conversations were titled *Questions and Answers 1929*. The present volume contains the same text.

Questions and Answers 1930–1931. These twenty-six reports of the Mother's conversations with disciples in 1930 and 1931 were recorded by a disciple in abbreviated long-hand and later reconstructed and elaborated. Several of them were published in 1949 in two journals of the Ashram, the monthly *Mother India* and the annual *Sri Aurobindo Circle*. Twenty-five talks were published under the title *Words of the Mother: Third Series* in 1951 and in 1966. A new talk, "Difficulties in Yoga", was included in the collection when it was brought out in 1977 as part of *Questions and Answers*, Volume 3 of the Collected Works of the Mother (first edition). In that volume the talks were entitled *Questions and Answers 1930–1931*. The present volume contains the same text. In 1989 these talks were printed together with the Mother's 1929 conversations under the title *Conversations 1929, 1930–1931*; a second impression was printed in 1997.

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Commentaries on the Dhammapada. The Mother based her commentaries on the *Dhammapada* on a French translation of the Pali text made by a French disciple. The commentaries, given in French, were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The text and commentaries were first published in 1960 under the title *Commentaires sur le Dhammapada*. A second edition appeared in 1964. An English translation was serialised in the quarterly journal *Advent* from November 1960 to February 1965. This translation was revised when the work was published in 1977 as part of *Questions and Answers*, Volume 3 of the Collected Works of the Mother. The present volume contains the same text. In 1989 the text and commentaries were first published independently as a book in English; a second impression of the book was issued in 1995.

Appendix to *Questions and Answers* 1929. These explanations by Sri Aurobindo were written in answer to queries posed by various disciples between 1933 and 1937. Most of them were addressed to a particular disciple in January 1937. The collection was published in 1972 in *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, Volume 25 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.