18 January 1956

Sweet Mother, here Sri Aurobindo writes, “For all this first period he [the individual] has to work by means of the instruments of the lower Nature.”

Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 79

What is this work, and how is it accomplished?

There is a positive side and a negative side to this work. The positive side is to increase one’s aspiration, develop one’s consciousness, unify one’s being, to go within in order to enter more and more into contact with one’s psychic being; to take up all the parts, all the movements, all the activities of one’s being and put them before this psychic consciousness so that they fall into their true place in relation to this centre; finally, to organise all one’s aspiration towards the Divine and one’s progress towards the Divine. That is the positive side.

At the same time the negative side consists in refusing methodically and with discernment all the influences which come from outside or from the subconscient or inconscient or from the environment, and stand in the way of spiritual progress. One must discern these influences, suggestions, impulses, and systematically refuse them without ever getting discouraged by their persistence and ever yielding to their will. One must, at the same time, observe clearly in one’s being all its different elements, obscure, egoistic, unconscious, or even ill-willed, which consciously or otherwise, answer these bad influences, and allow them not only to penetrate into the consciousness, but sometimes to get settled there. That is the negative side.

Both must be practised at the same time. According to the moment, the occasion, the inner readiness, you must insist now on one, now on the other, but never forget either of them.
Generally, all progress made on one side is set off by an attack of the adverse forces on the other. So, the more you advance, the more vigilant must you become. And the most essential quality is perseverance, endurance, and a... what shall I call it? — a kind of inner good humour which helps you not to get discouraged, not to become sad, and to face all difficulties with a smile. There is an English word which expresses this very well — cheerfulness. If you can keep this within you, you fight much better, resist much better, in the light, these bad influences which try to hinder you from progressing.

That is the work. It is vast and complex. And one must never forget anything.

Sweet Mother, “The Supreme has laid his luminous hand upon a chosen human vessel of his miraculous Light and Power and Ananda.”

Does the Supreme choose the being who will be his instrument, or does the being choose to become his instrument?

You can take it as you like.

One can’t tell who began! But the two usually take place at the same time.

If you want an order of priority, it is evident that the Divine exists before the individual, so it must be the Divine who has chosen first! But that is a choice prior to terrestrial life. In the order of the ordinary human consciousness it may be one or the other or both at the same time. In fact, it is likely that the Divine is the first to notice that this or that being is ready! But he who is ready generally does not know it to begin with, so he has the impression that it is he who has decided and is choosing. But this is more of an impression than a reality.

And once you are chosen, it is ineluctable, you can’t escape even if you try.
Questions and Answers

_Sweet Mother, here I would like an explanation: “In the last period there is no effort at all, no set method, no fixed sadhana; the place of endeavour and tapasya will be taken by a natural, simple, powerful and happy disclosing of the flower of the Divine out of the bud of a purified and perfected terrestrial nature.”_

_The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 81_

It is in a poetic form.

But what is it you don’t understand? Why he speaks about the bud and the flower?

_I am asking this because the bud opens into a flower without any effort, but we have to make an effort, haven’t we?_

He says that this happens when one is ready; it is precisely to make you think “but the bud opens without effort”; so, when the nature is ready, the same thing happens as with the bud.

“Effort”, I don’t know what we call effort, it is not certain whether the plant makes an effort or not. And in any case, it has an aspiration; plants grow because they aspire for the light, for the sun, for open air.

And it’s a kind of competition. If one goes into a wood, for instance, into a park where there are many different plants, one can observe very clearly that there is a sort of competition among plants to pass each other and reach the light and open air above. It is indeed quite wonderful to see.

Now, Sri Aurobindo means that when one is well prepared and the nature is ready, then the last movement is like a spontaneous blossoming — it’s no longer an effort, it’s an answer. It is a truly divine action in the being: one is prepared and the moment has come, then the bud opens.
Is there an aspiration for growth in children also, as there is in plants?

Yes. Even, very often it is conscious: they want to be tall.

Does it then depend upon their aspiration — their being tall or short?

At a particular time, yes. Indeed, I have known children who have grown tall because they had a very strong will to grow.

Yes, that has an effect even when one is no longer quite a child. I have seen cases of people who grew taller even at twenty-five, so very anxious were they to grow tall. And I am not speaking of those who have practised physical culture, for that’s different; with physical training one can considerably change one’s body; I am just speaking of an aspiration, an inner will. The body is sufficiently plastic till twenty-five. Later one must introduce more scientific methods, like physical culture; and if that is done wisely and methodically, one can obtain wonderful results. But always, behind it, there must be a will, that is very important; a kind of tenacious aspiration, a knowledge, or even a faith that one is not necessarily tied down by atavism.

For obviously, like plants, one is limited by the original seed, the species to which one belongs. But all the same there is a wide margin. For instance, I have very many times seen children who were considerably taller than their parents, and had truly wanted to be so. Of course, it was against a certain resistance and within a certain limit, but one can push back the limit a good deal.

And in fact, according to the theories of heredity and atavism, it is said that heredity can skip generations, and there are few families where at least one member was not tall and so could justify the height of his grandchildren or great-grandchildren.
Questions and Answers

_Sweet Mother, can a plant grow otherwise than physically?

In plants there is a great vital force. And this vital force has a considerable action. And there is also the genius of the species, which is a consciousness. There is already an active consciousness at work in plants.

And in the genius of the species there is a beginning — quite embryonic, but still — there is a beginning of response to the psychic influence, and certain flowers are clearly the expression of a psychic attitude and aspiration in the plant, not very conscious of itself, but existing like a spontaneous impetus.

It is quite certain, for instance, that if you have a special affection for a plant, if, in addition to the material care you give it, you love it, if you feel close to it, it feels this; its blossoming is much more harmonious and happy, it grows better, it lives longer. All this means a response in the plant itself. Consequently, there is the presence there of a certain consciousness; and surely the plant has a vital being.

_Mother, does a plant have its own individuality and does it also reincarnate after death?

This may happen, but it is accidental.

There are trees — trees especially — which have lived long and can be the home of a conscious being, a vital being. Generally it is vital entities which take shelter in trees, or else certain beings of the vital plane which live in forests — as certain beings of the vital live in water. There were old legends like that, but they were based on facts.

The plant serves as home and shelter, but the being is not created by the plant itself!

(Silence)

26
Can the being who is chosen by the Divine know it from his very birth?

Even before his birth.

Perhaps his birth is the result of this choice; generally it is like that. But at any time at all in his life this can happen. Yet for those who are predestined it is before birth; usually they come to earth with an intention and a specific purpose.

You would like to know very much if this has happened to you, yes? (Laughter) Well, try — try to find out: have this inner aspiration, concentrate, and then try. If you get a result, tell me; I shall tell you if it is right.

(Looking at another disciple) He has yet something on his mind!

Mother, to continue this question about the last sentence: “The Supreme has laid his luminous hand upon a chosen human vessel of his miraculous Light....”

Yes.

Can this be applied generally or is it for one in a million?

What do you mean by “generally”? Everyone on earth? Is that what you mean?

All those who aspire and do yoga, or is it only one person?

Oh! now it begins to take shape! (Laughter) Is it only one individual the Divine chooses to manifest Him or can He choose several? — He chooses several.

But here too there is a hierarchy. One can understand nothing of the spiritual life if one does not understand the true hierarchy.

27
Questions and Answers

Nowadays it’s not in fashion. It is something which human thought doesn’t favour at all. But from the spiritual point of view, it is automatic, spontaneous and indisputable. And so, if the hierarchy is true, there is a place for everybody; and for each individual in his own place, his individual truth is absolute. That is to say, each element which is truly in its place has a total and perfect relation with the Divine — in its place. And yet, on the whole, there is a hierarchy which too is quite absolute. But to understand spiritual life one must first understand that; and it isn’t very easy.

Everyone can be a perfect expression of the Divine in himself, on condition that he knows his place and keeps to it.

*And if they do not know the hierarchy, they cannot know this?*

But they don’t need to know that they form a hierarchy, it is not necessary to know it. It is only if one wants to physically organise a spiritual society — then one has to materialise the hierarchy. But generally, in the world as it is, there are so many gaps in this hierarchy that it seems a confusion.

The perfect hierarchy is a total hierarchy, and it is not concerned with time and space. But when you want to realise this physically it becomes very difficult. It’s like weaving a piece of cloth with lots of holes everywhere; and the holes disturb the general harmony. Always people are missing, steps are missing, pieces are missing on the chess-board — all this is missing. So it looks like a confusion. But if everything were expressed and each thing in its place, it would be a perfect harmony and a perfect hierarchy.

There is somewhere — not in the material universe, but in the manifested universe — this perfect hierarchy; it exists. But it is not yet manifested upon earth.

Perhaps this will be one of the results of the supramental transformation: the world will be ready for a perfect,
spontaneous, essentially true hierarchical manifestation — and without any kind of coercion — where everyone will become aware of his own perfection.

*Mother, what does a spiritual hierarchy mean exactly? Because when we speak of hierarchy that implies something graded in a superior and inferior order, doesn’t it?*

Yes, and that’s quite wrong. That is to say, materially it is like that. But this is not what I call a hierarchy.

*Then what is a hierarchy?*

It is the organisation of the functions and the manifestation in action of the particular nature of each person.

We have often tried to find comparisons, but they are worthless. For none of the things we know physically can answer to that condition. There is always the sense of superiority and inferiority as you say... Some have compared a hierarchy to the various functions of the body, for example. But that always gives the impression that the head is at the top and the feet at the bottom, so it is a nuisance!

*Each element is the whole Divine at the same time, then how can we speak of a hierarchy?*

Each element has a direct and perfect relation with the Divine.

*But can’t they become the whole Divine?*

Yes, all become the Divine; but not the totality of the Divine, for the Divine is everything. You can’t take a piece of the Divine and say, “This is the Divine.” And yet, in his spiritual consciousness each one has a perfect relation with the Divine, that is to say, each
Questions and Answers

one is the Divine as perfectly as he can be. But to reconstruct the Divine, all the Divine is necessary. And it is precisely this that constitutes the very essence of hierarchy. But as each one is perfect in himself, there can be no feeling of inferiority or superiority.

I don’t think the human mentality can understand that. I think it must be lived; once one has lived it, it is very simple, it appears luminously simple. But to understand it with the mind is not possible, it seems impossible. Above all because the mind, in order to understand anything at all, has to divide and contrast everything, otherwise it does not understand, it gets confused. By its very functioning, it becomes incapable of understanding.

(Silence)

_Sweet Mother, how can one say that a fact is “already accomplished” where it has not yet been manifested — for instance, that the Divine has chosen an instrument, when nothing is yet apparent?_

Yes, within, in the world which is not yet manifested, the decision is there, it is taken there; but then it must come to the surface.

It corresponds exactly to what I have already told you so often about the freedom of India. After going to a certain plane, I said to Sri Aurobindo, “India is free.” I didn’t say, “She will be free”; I said, “She is free.” Well, between that moment when it was an accomplished fact and the time when it was translated into the material world on earth, how many years were necessary? It was in 1915, and liberation came in 1947, that is, thirty-two years later. There you are, that is the exact picture of the resistance.

So, for the individual it is the same thing; sometimes it takes as long as that, sometimes it goes faster.

_You say you saw India free..._
No, I did not see: I knew.

You said to Sri Aurobindo: “India is free.” Was India free as one whole or cut into two as it is at present?

I meant specially what happened in 1947, that is, the withdrawal of foreign domination, that’s all. Nothing but that, not her moral or spiritual freedom, I did not speak of that at all. I simply said she was free from foreign domination, because, even to a question Sri Aurobindo put to me, I answered from the same plane, “There will be no violence, this will come about without a revolution, it will be the English who will decide to go away of their own accord, for things will become too hot for them owing to certain world circumstances.” So that was the only point, there was no spiritual question here.

And that’s how things happened. And I had told Sri Aurobindo this in 1915, exactly. It was all there, it was there—I guessed nothing nor prophesied anything: it was a fact.

And so, that gives you the exact picture of the length of time necessary between the established fact and the inner realisation. And for the individual it is the same thing: he is chosen, he has chosen; and he has chosen the Divine and he is chosen; and it is something which has been decided; and it will be realised inevitably, one can’t escape even if one tries. Only, it may take a very long time.

Mother, I was asking... (laughter) You said that India was free in 1915, but was she free as she is free now? Because India is not free as one whole. She is broken up.

Oh! Oh! that’s what you wanted to know.

That... the details were not there. No, there must have been a possibility of its being otherwise, for, when Sri Aurobindo told
Questions and Answers

them to do a certain thing, sent them his message,¹ he knew very well that it was possible to avoid what happened later. If they had listened to him at that time, there would have been no division. Consequently, the division was not decreed, it was a human deformation. It is beyond question a human deformation.

But then, how can it be said that the decision of the Supreme cannot be eluded?

What?

If the Divine had chosen that India would be free...

No, no, it’s not like that, my child! (Laughter)

It’s a fact, that’s all. It is the Divine who is India, it is the Divine who is freedom, it is the Divine who is subjection, it is the Divine who is everything — then how could He choose?

(Silence)

I advise you to go up there and see, then you will understand. So long as you have not climbed right up the ladder, it will be difficult to understand.

¹ In 1942, at the time of the proposals offered by the British through Sir Stafford Cripps, not yet granting independence to India but leading towards it, Sri Aurobindo took the trouble of sending a special messenger to Delhi to convince certain responsible persons that the proposals must be accepted. They did not understand. Had the proposals been accepted, the partition of India and its accompanying atrocities would most probably have been avoided.