13 November 1957

I have a question about the first page where Sri Aurobindo says, “A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling Spirit, is then the key-note, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence.”

The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 824

So, from the point of view of form, in what way is man superior to other animals?

I think this is quite easy to find.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of the form that is capable of manifesting the Spirit. The very nature of the manifestation of the Spirit is consciousness, understanding and finally mastery. It is obvious that from the point of view of aesthetics and purely physical appearance, one may find certain animal forms beautiful and perhaps even more beautiful than the human form in its present state of... degeneration, I believe. There were periods when the human race seems to have been more beautiful and harmonious; but as a means of expression of the Spirit, its superiority is beyond the shadow of a doubt. For the mere fact that man stands upright is symbolic of the capacity to look at things from above. He dominates what he sees instead of always having his nose to the ground. Of course, it may be said that birds fly, but with wings it is difficult to have a means of intellectual self-expression!

This upright position is very symbolic. If you try to walk on all fours, you will see that this position with the eyes and nose necessarily turned to the ground does not give you the feeling that you are looking at things from another plane or
even from above. The whole structure of the human body is made to express a mental life. The proportions of the brain, for instance, the structure of the human head, the structure of the arms and hands, all that, from the point of view of the expression of the Spirit, is unquestionably altogether superior and it seems to have been conceived and built exclusively for the purpose of expressing intelligence.

Certainly from the point of view of strength, of suppleness, of agility, man is not the most gifted of animals, but for expressing the Spirit no other animal can be compared with him. Everything is made with this in view. We may wish to add to this possibility other things which seem to have been sacrificed just for the sake of the mental life — but also precisely because of this capacity of expressing a mental life man is able to develop in himself faculties which are only latent. Man has a power to educate: his body can be developed, educated. He can increase certain faculties. You cannot imagine any animal, even among those we most admire, which is capable, for instance, of physical education, purely physical — I am not speaking of going to school or learning things, but purely physical education, a systematic development of the muscles. The animal is born and makes good use of what it has and it grows according to its own law, but it does not educate itself or does it in a very rudimentary way, in an extremely limited field; whereas by a normal and systematic development man can remedy his defects and shortcomings. Man is certainly, in an organised way, the first progressive animal who can augment his capacities, his possibilities, increase his faculties and acquire things that he did not have spontaneously. There is not one animal which can do that.

Yes, under man’s influence some animals have learnt movements they did not make spontaneously, but that is still under man’s influence. Certainly without men dogs or horses would never have learnt to do what they have learnt through contact with man. So, it is obvious that the human physical form is
the most appropriate one for expressing the Spirit. It may seem inadequate to us, but precisely we feel we are capable of drawing out from our bodies more than they would have given spontaneously without an educating will. And with this possibility of expressing intelligence, observation, comprehension, deduction — all the mental qualities — man has gradually learnt to understand the laws of Nature and tried not only to understand them but master them.

If we compare what he is with the higher being living in the Truth which we want to become, we may obviously speak about man as he is at present in a very derogatory fashion and complain of his imperfection. But if we put ourselves in the place of the animals which immediately precede him in the evolution, we see that he is endowed with possibilities and powers which the others are quite incapable of expressing. The mere fact of having the ambition, the desire, the will to know the laws of Nature and to master them sufficiently to be able to adapt them to his needs and change them to a certain extent, is something impossible, unthinkable for any animal.

You may tell me that I don’t usually speak very kindly about man (laughter), but that’s because he usually thinks too kindly of himself!

If we compare him with the other products of Nature, unquestionably he is at the top of the ladder.

But, Mother, then the question arises: Does the descent of the consciousness develop the form or is it the development of the form that compels the descent of a higher consciousness?

There would be no universe without the descent of consciousness. Where would your universe begin, and with what?

In the case of man, did the animal man bring down the mind or was it the descent of mind...
Oh! You mean: Is it something in the intermediary being or in the higher ape which by its aspiration called down the mind? But the aspiration itself is the result of a previous descent.

It is quite obvious that nothing can be manifested which is not previously contained in what exists. One can’t bring something out of nothing. One can make what is there emerge, manifest, express itself, develop; but if nothing had been there, nothing would ever have come out. All progress, all perfection is the result of an inner effort of “something” that is present and seeks to manifest. That is to say, absolutely, the principle comes first and the expression afterwards. As we go on reading *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo will prove this to you in every possible way. If there were not an eternal principle, if there were not—we give it all the names we like, can’t we?—a Supreme Reality, there would never have been a universe, because nothing comes out of nothing.

We shall see this as we read on; then you will have to do philosophical gymnastics. But anyway, even without philosophy and mental gymnastics, it is obvious that to make something, you need to have something to make it with.

There is or was a whole period in the development of the human mind in which men tried very seriously to prove that it was the perfecting of Matter which produced the Spirit. But that is nonsense! (*Mother laughs*). The least of your activities, all that you do, is a clear proof that first you conceive and then you do, even on a very small scale. A life which is not the result of a conscious will would be a completely incoherent life. I mean that if Nature were not a conscious force and a conscious will with a conscious aim, nothing could ever have been organised. We have just to observe a little, even in the very small field of observation we have in our individual life, to be completely convinced of it.

But anyway... It is precisely one of the subjects Sri Aurobindo deals with in great detail, so we shall speak about it again.

(*Silence*)

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It could be said that the mastery of fire is the symbolic sign of human superiority. Wherever there is man, a fire is lit.

The two things that are clearly superior to animal activities are the faculty of writing and the possibility of articulate speech. And this is something so clearly superior that all sufficiently developed animals are extremely sensitive to articulate speech; it fascinates them. If you speak in a very clear, very modulated, very well articulated way to a wild animal, it is immediately attracted, truly fascinated—I am not speaking of those which have lived close to man, but precisely of animals which have never met man before. They listen immediately, they feel the superior power that is being expressed.