14 April 1951

Mother reads a question asked during her talk in 1929:

“Is not surrender the same as sacrifice?”

Questions and Answers 1929 (4 August)

Who is going to answer? What is the difference?

Surrender comes spontaneously.

I congratulate those whose surrender is spontaneous! It is not so easy. No, that is not the difference.

Sacrifice diminishes the being.

That is true, but why? One thing is so, so simple — it is the very meaning of the word. To sacrifice means to give up something to which one clings. To sacrifice one’s life is to give up one’s life to which one clings; otherwise it would not be a sacrifice, it would be a gift. If you use the word “sacrifice”, it means it is something which makes you suffer when you give it up. The word “sacrifice” is used at random, that is understood, but I am speaking of the true sense. One can sacrifice only what one holds dear. If one does not cling to it, it is not a sacrifice, it is a gift with all the joy of the giving. Surrender has no value if it is painful, if it is a sacrifice. Surrender must be truly a joyous offering (I am using the word soumission in the sense of surrender, but it is not quite surrender — surrender is between soumission and abandon). One gives up something, surrenders oneself, but without sacrifice.
“In our Yoga there is no room for sacrifice. But every-thing depends on the meaning you put in the word. In its pure sense it means a consecrated giving, made sacred by offering 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.... When you do anything with the sense of a compression of your being, be sure that you are doing it in the wrong way.”

Ibid.

Why does sacrifice have such a great value in religion?

Many religions are founded upon the idea of sacrifice; for instance, all the Chaldean religions. The reforms of the Muslim religion also had a very strong tendency towards sacrifice. All the first adepts, the first faithful, paid with their life for changing their religion. In Persia, they were persecuted beyond all telling. There are even many writings in which the joys of sacrifice are praised highly — that is a Chaldean idea. But you should be on your guard; all depends upon the meaning given to the word. It is obvious that for him who sacrifices himself willingly, that is, who gives up his life voluntarily and with joy, it is no longer a sacrifice, by the very definition we have given to the word.

We also speak of the “sacrifice” of the Divine. But I have noticed that one calls it “sacrifice” when one understands that if obliged to do it oneself it would be very difficult! It would give you much pain, it would be very hard (laughing) so one speaks of sacrifice, but it is probable that for the Divine it was not painful and he did it willingly, with all the joy of self-giving.

I knew Abdul Baha very well, the successor of Baha Ullah, founder of the Bahai religion; Abdul Baha was his son. He was born in prison and lived in prison till he was forty, I believe. When he came out of prison his father was dead and he began
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to preach his father’s religion. He told me his story and what had happened in Persia at the beginning of the religion. And I remember him telling me with what intense joy, what a sense of the divine Presence, of the divine Force, these people went to the sacrifice — it can’t be called “sacrifice”, it was a very joyful gift of their life.... He always spoke to me of someone who was, it appears, a very great poet and who had been arrested as a heretic because he followed the Bahai religion. They wanted to take him away to kill him — or burn him, hang him, crucify him, I don’t know what, the manner of death in vogue at the time — and, because he expressed his faith and said he would be happy to suffer anything for his faith and his God, people devised the plan of fixing small lighted candle-ends on his body, his arms, his shoulders. Naturally the candles melted with the hot wax all over, till the wick of the candle burnt the skin. It seems Abdul Baha was there when this man was tortured and as they came to the spot where he was to be killed, Abdul Baha went up to speak to him affectionately — and he was in an ecstasy of joy. Abdul Baha spoke to him of his sufferings; he replied, “Suffer! It is one of the most beautiful hours of my life....” This cannot be called a sacrifice, can it?

Generally, all those who have suffered tortures for their faith, that is, for their highest thought, their most sublime ideal, have always felt a kind of divine grace helping them and keeping them from suffering. Of course, outsiders call this a “sacrifice” (that is understandable, they have sacrificed their life), but one cannot use the word for what personally concerns them, because for them it was not a sacrifice, it was a joy. All depends on the inner attitude. Now, if for a single moment during the torture they had had the least idea, “Why am I being tortured?” they would have undergone unbearable suffering. A single passing thought suffices.

Almost all events — at least all the important circumstances of human life — may be looked at from two sides: from below or from above. If you see them from below, with the feelings of
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the ordinary man, you are terrified by the amount of suffering of all those who have preached a new religion or wished to set an example to humanity — they have all suffered, that is, they have all been persecuted by men. Generally speaking, with a very few exceptions, men do not like what is superior to them, and when they meet someone who is far above them (I am saying, apart from some exceptions), that makes them furious. They suffer an almost insurmountable annoyance in meeting something so infinitely higher than what they are. They have only one idea, to destroy it, and in fact that is what they have done. Throughout human history it has been thus. Those who have come with special abilities, a special grace, and have tried to make men come out of their ordinary rut, have been more or less persecuted, martyred, burnt alive, put on the cross.... The situation now is apparently a little better because now slightly more plausible reasons than those of old are needed to burn men — the habit of doing so is no longer there — but the feelings are not very different. The human race, generally, has a sort of rancour against what surpasses it; it feels humiliated, and men do not like to be humiliated.

Sometimes, on waking up, one forgets everything, one forgets where one is. Why?

It is because you have gone into the inconscient and lost all contact with the consciousness, and this takes a little time to be reestablished. Of course, it may happen that instead of going into the inconscient one goes into the superconscient, but this is not frequent. And the feeling is not the same because, instead of having this negative impression of not knowing who one is or where one is or what is what, one has a positive sensation of having risen into something other than one’s ordinary life, of no longer being the same person. But when one has altogether lost contact with one’s ordinary consciousness, generally it is that one has slept and been for a long time in the inconscient. Then
the being is scattered, it is absorbed by this inconscient and all the pieces have to be put together again. Naturally, this is done much more quickly than at the beginning of existence, but the conscious elements have to be gathered up again and a cohesion re-formed to begin to know once more who one is.

*Sometimes in dreams one goes into houses, streets, places one has never seen. What does this mean?*

There may be many reasons for this. Perhaps it is an exteriorisation: one has come out of the body and gone for a stroll. They may be memories of former lives. Perhaps one has become identified with someone else’s consciousness and has the memories of this other person. Perhaps it is a premonition (this is the rarest case, but it may happen): one sees ahead what one will see later.

The other day I spoke to you about those landscapes of Japan; well, almost all — the most beautiful, the most striking ones — I had seen in vision in France; and yet I had not seen any pictures or photographs of Japan, I knew nothing of Japan. And I had seen these landscapes without human beings, nothing but the landscape, quite pure, like that, and it had seemed to me they were visions of a world other than the physical; they seemed to me too beautiful for the physical world, too perfectly beautiful. Particularly I used to see very often those stairs rising straight up into the sky; in my vision there was the impression of climbing straight up, straight up, and as though one could go on climbing, climbing, climbing,... It had struck me, and the first time I saw this in Nature down there, I understood that I had already seen it in France before having known anything about Japan.

There are always many explanations possible and it is very difficult to explain for someone else. For oneself, if one has studied very carefully one’s dreams and activities of the night, one can distinguish fine nuances. I was saying I thought I had a vision of another world — I knew it was something which
existed, but I could not imagine there was a country where it existed; this seemed to me impossible, so very beautiful it was. It was the active mind which interfered. But I knew that what I was seeing truly existed, and it was only when I saw these landscapes physically that I realised in fact that I had seen something which existed, but I had seen it with inner eyes (it was the subtle-physical) before seeing it physically. Everyone has certain very small indications, but for that one must be very, very methodical, very scrupulous, very careful in one’s observation and not neglect the least signs, and above all not give favourable mental explanations to the experiences one has. For if one wants to explain to oneself (I don’t even speak of explaining to others), if one wants to explain the experience to oneself advantageously, to draw satisfaction, one does not understand anything any more. That is, one may mix up the signs without even noticing that they are mixed up. For instance, when one sees somebody in a dream (I am not speaking of dreams in which you see somebody unknown, but of those where you see somebody you know, who comes to see you) there are all sorts of explanations possible. If it is someone living far away from you, in another country, perhaps that person has written a letter to you and the letter is on the way, so you see this person because he has put a formation of himself in his letter, a concentration; you see the person and the next morning you get the letter. This is a very frequent occurrence. If it is a person with a very strong thought-power, he may think of you from very far, from his own country and concentrate his thought, and this concentration takes the form of that person in your consciousness. Perhaps it is that this person is calling you intentionally; deliberately he comes to tell you something or give you a sign, if he is in danger, if he is sick. Suppose he has something important to tell you, he begins to concentrate (he knows how to do it, as everyone does not) and he enters your atmosphere, comes to tell you something special. Now if you are passive and attentive, you receive the message. And then, two more instances still: someone has exteriorised
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himself more or less materially in his sleep and has come to see you. And you become conscious of this person because (almost by miracle) you are in a corresponding state of consciousness. And finally, a last instance, this person may be dead and may come to see you after his death (one part of him or almost the whole of his being according to the relation you have with him). Consequently, for someone who is not very, very careful it is very difficult to distinguish these nuances, very difficult. On the other hand, quite often imaginative people will tell you, “Oh! I saw this person — he is dead.” I have heard that I don’t know how many times. These are people whose imagination runs freely. It is possible that the person is dead, but not because he has appeared to you!... One must pay great attention to the outer forms things take. There are shades very difficult to distinguish, one must be very, very careful. For oneself, if one is in the habit of studying all this, one can become aware of the differences, but to interpret another’s experiences is very difficult, unless he gives you in great detail all that surrounds the dream, the vision: the ideas he had before, the ideas he had later, the state of his health, the feelings he experienced when going to sleep, the activities of the preceding day, indeed, all sorts of things. People who tell you, “Oh! I had this vision, explain it to me!”, that is childishness — unless it is someone whom you have followed very carefully, whom you yourself have taught how to recognise the planes, and whose habits, whose reactions you know; otherwise it is impossible to explain, for there are innumerable explanations for one single thing.

There are some very remarkable instances of exteriorisation. I am going to tell you two incidents about cats which occurred quite a long time ago in France. One happened very long ago, long before the war even. We used to have small meetings every week — quite a small number of friends, three or four, who discussed philosophy, spiritual experiences, etc. There was a young boy, a poet, but one who was rather light-minded; he was very intelligent, he was a student in Paris. He used to come regularly
to these meetings (they took place on Wednesday evenings) and one evening he did not come. We were surprised; we had met him a few days before and he had said he would come — he did not come. We waited quite a long time, the meeting was over and at the time of leaving I opened the door to let people out (it was at my house that these meetings were held), I opened the door and there before it sat a big dark grey cat which rushed into the room like mad and jumped upon me, like this, mewing desperately. I looked into its eyes and told myself, “Well, these are so-and-so’s eyes” (the one who was to come). I said, “Surely something has happened to him.” And the next day we learnt that he had been assassinated that night; the next morning he had been found lying strangled on his bed. This is the first story. The other happened long afterwards, at the time of the war — the First [World] War, not the Second — the war of the trenches. There was a young man I knew very well; he was a poet and artist (I have already spoken about him), who had gone to the war. He had enlisted, he was very young; he was an officer. He had given me his photograph. (This boy was a student of Sanskrit and knew Sanskrit very well, he liked Buddhism very much; indeed he was much interested in things of the spirit, he was not an ordinary boy, far from it.) He had given me his photograph on which there was a sentence in Sanskrit written in his own hand, very well written. I had framed this photograph and put it above a sort of secretaire (a rather high desk with drawers); well, above it I had hung this photograph. And at that time it was very difficult to receive news, one did not know very well what was happening. From time to time we used to receive letters from him, but for a long time there had been nothing, when, one day, I came into my room, and the moment I entered, without any apparent reason the photograph fell from the wall where it had been well fixed, and the glass broke with a great clatter. I felt a little anxious, I said, “There is something wrong.” But we had no news. Two or three days later (it was on the first floor; I lived in a house with one room upstairs, all the rest on
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the ground-floor, and there was a flight of steps leading to the
garden) I opened the entrance door and a big grey cat rushed
in — light grey, this time — a magnificent cat, and, just as the
other one had done, it flung itself upon me, like this, mewing. I
looked into its eyes — it had the eyes of... that boy. And this cat,
it turned and turned around me and all the time tugged at my
dress and miaowed. I wanted to put it out, but it would not go,
it settled down there and did not want to move. The next day it
was announced in the papers that this boy had been found dead
between two trenches, dead for three days. That is, at the time
he must have died his photograph had fallen. The consciousness
had left the body completely: he was there abandoned, because
they did not always go to see what was happening between the
trenches; they could not, you understand; he was found two or
three days later; at that time probably he had gone out altogether
from his body and wanted definitely to inform me about what
had happened and he had found that cat. For cats live in the
vital, they have a very developed vital consciousness and can
easily be taken possession of by vital forces.

But these two examples are quite extraordinary, for they
both came about almost in the same way, and in both in-
stances the eyes of these cats had completely changed — they
had become human eyes.