23 May 1956

Sweet Mother, what is the difference between yoga and religion?

Ah! my child... it is as though you were asking me the difference between a dog and a cat!

(Long silence)

Imagine someone who, in some way or other, has heard of something like the Divine or has a personal feeling that something of the kind exists, and begins to make all sorts of efforts: efforts of will, of discipline, efforts of concentration, all sorts of efforts to find this Divine, to discover what He is, to become acquainted with Him and unite with Him. Then this person is doing yoga.

Now, if this person has noted down all the processes he has used and constructs a fixed system, and sets up all that he has discovered as absolute laws — for example, he says: the Divine is like this, to find the Divine you must do this, make this particular gesture, take this attitude, perform this ceremony, and you must admit that this is the truth, you must say, “I accept that this is the Truth and I fully adhere to it; and your method is the only right one, the only one which exists” — if all that is written down, organised, arranged into fixed laws and ceremonies, it becomes a religion.

Can one realise the Divine by this method [of religion]?

Those who carry within themselves a spiritual destiny and are born to realise the Divine, to become conscious in Him and live Him, will arrive, no matter what path, what way they follow. That is to say, even in religion there are people who have had
the spiritual experience and found the Divine — not because of the religion, usually in spite of it, notwithstanding it — because they had the inner urge and this urge led them there despite all obstacles and through them. Everything served their purpose.

But if these very people want to express their experience, they naturally use the terms of the religion in which they were brought up, so they restrict their experience and inevitably limit it very much, they make it sectarian, so to say. But they themselves may very well have gone beyond all the forms and all the limitations and all the conventions and may have had the true experience in its pure simplicity.

_Sweet Mother, in the world today most people follow some sort of religion. Are they helped?_

Not much.

Perhaps they are taking it up again now, but for a very long time, towards the beginning of this century, they had repudiated religion as something opposed to knowledge — at least all intellectual people had. And it is only recently that a movement of return to something other than a thorough-going positivism has begun.

People follow religion by social habit, in order not to get into the bad books of others. For instance, in a village it is difficult not to go to religious ceremonies, for all your neighbours will point at you. But that has absolutely nothing to do with spiritual life, nothing at all.

(Silence)

The first time I came to India I came on a Japanese boat. And on this Japanese boat there were two clergymen, that is, Protestant priests, of different sects. I don’t remember exactly which sects, but they were both English; I think one was an Anglican and the other a Presbyterian.
Now, Sunday came. There had to be a religious ceremony on the boat, or else we would have looked like heathens, like the Japanese! There had to be a ceremony, but who should perform it? Should it be the Anglican or should it be the Presbyterian? They just missed quarrelling. Finally, one of them withdrew with dignity — I don’t remember now which one, I think it was the Anglican — and the Presbyterian performed his ceremony.

It took place in the lounge of the ship. We had to go down a few steps to this lounge. And that day, all the men had put on their jackets — it was hot, I think we were in the Red Sea — they put on their jackets, stiff collars, leather shoes; neckties well set, hats on their heads, and they went with a book under their arm, almost in a procession from the deck to the lounge. The ladies wore their hats, some carried even a parasol, and they too had their book under the arm, a prayer-book.

And so they all crowded down into the lounge, and the Presbyterian made a speech, that is to say, preached his sermon, and everybody listened very religiously. And then, when it was over, they all came up again with the satisfied air of someone who has done his duty. And, of course, five minutes later they were in the bar drinking and playing cards, and their religious ceremony was forgotten. They had done their duty, it was over, there was nothing more to be said about it.

And the clergyman came and asked me, more or less politely, why I had not attended. I told him, “Sir, I am sorry, but I don’t believe in religion.”

“Oh! oh! you are a materialist?”

“No, not at all.”

“Ah! then why?”

“Oh!” I said, “if I were to tell you, you would be quite displeased, perhaps it is better for me not to say anything.”

But he insisted so much that at last I said, “Just try to see, I don’t feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and a social custom, but not
at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God.”

“Enter into communion with God! But we can’t do that! All that we can do is to say some good words, but we have no capacity to enter into communion with God.”

Then I said, “But it was just because of that I didn’t go, for it doesn’t interest me.”

After that he asked me many questions and admitted to me that he was going to China to convert the “heathens”. At that I became serious and told him, “Listen, even before your religion was born — not even two thousand years ago — the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians. And so you are going there to convert those who know more about it than you? What are you going to teach them? To be insincere, to perform hollow ceremonies instead of following a profound philosophy and a detachment from life which lead them to a more spiritual consciousness?... I don’t think it’s a very good thing you are going to do.”

Then he felt so suffocated, the poor man; he said to me, “Eh, I fear I can’t be convinced by your words!”

“Oh!” I said, “I am not trying to convince you, I only described the situation to you, and how I don’t quite see why barbarians should want to go and teach civilised people what they have known long before you. That’s all.”

And there, that was the end of it.

*Mother, in the Buddhist traditions it is said...*

Oh! Oh! you are becoming a Buddhist. It’s the fashion.

Yes?

*It is said that two thousand five hundred years after his birth...*
Questions and Answers

Yes, he will return to earth to preach a new Buddhism, is that it?

*It seems his teaching will come to an end, and will be replaced by something new.*

Yes, it is that gentleman, what is his name... X, who told you that?

But that is his theory. He told me also that he thought that it was Sri Aurobindo who had realised the teachings of the Buddha. Is that it? You didn’t go to his lecture?... No, then what did you want to ask?

*Because it is now — tomorrow is the day the two thousand five hundred years will be over — does this correspond to the new thing?*

What new thing?

*The new Supramental Manifestation.*

Oh! Listen, this seems to me just the kind of discovery one makes when one wants something sensational.

There are always many ways of interpreting texts, and one does it according to what one likes them to say.

*(Silence)*

That reminds me of something: *(turning to a teacher)* have they found the sounds with which hieroglyphs are to be read?

*Egyptian?*

Yes, hieroglyphs are Egyptian!
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I think so.

That means they have found the spoken language of five thousand years ago?

I think so. And there are hieroglyphs which are also phonetic.

Phonetic! Where can we get this information from?

In the library, Mother, there is something.

Oh!... Because I was wondering how they had restored the names of the pharaohs and gods. Naturally, more recent peoples have spoken about them, the Greeks mention them, the Phoenicians speak of them; they had phonetic writing. But earlier than that? The first pharaohs and all those names of the gods, who discovered these?

According to tradition it is Champollion, with the Rosetta Stone; they found a stone with inscriptions in Egyptian, Greek and Coptic, which enabled them to solve the problem.

He was sure it was the same thing written in Egyptian and in Greek? How was he sure of that?

There was a vague idea, there were some points of reference and cross-checking.

But that was for the meaning, not for the sounds.

Yes.

What language was spoken in the Schools of Initiation? How did they express themselves, those people?
Questions and Answers

I know that sounds are given for the words. Now, whether they know the exact pronunciation or not is another matter. They don’t even know the pronunciation of ancient Greek.

Greek? They don’t know the pronunciation?

They don’t know how it used to be pronounced.

Is the language of ancient Egypt contemporaneous with the earliest Sanskrit, or is it earlier still? And then, something else: was the cuneiform script of Assyria phonetic or hieroglyphic?

I believe that there too it is possible to read the sounds, for quite a number of names given in the Bible have been set right and it has been found that there were deformations: Nabuchodonson, for example.

Yes. Oh! that has been changed.

Now, whether they are absolutely sure of having found the sounds...

Yes, that seems strange to me. For a book came to my hands in which the names had been restored, and had become a little queer! But still, there must have been a certain way of pronouncing them. I mean, does any other human language go back further than the earliest Sanskrit?

I don’t know the dates of the earliest language.

And one last thing: is this hieroglyphic Egyptian language related to the Chaldean line or to the Aryan? There are Sanskrit roots in all the languages. That was precisely what I wanted to ask.
I read somewhere that the priests of Egypt used to give initiation with mantras.

Sanskrit mantras? But that must be in a novel, surely!

A few Sanskrit words.

There are Sanskrit roots — with some distortions — in all languages. And there is a very old tradition claiming to be older than the two bifurcating lines, Aryan and Chaldean. But Greek, for instance, which is relatively recent, is it a language of Aryan or Chaldean origin?

Greek is entirely Aryan.

Entirely Aryan.

Egyptian is of Chaldean origin.

Chaldean, yes. But everywhere there was an intermixture of Egyptian and Greek.

The Phoenician language was older. From the point of view of the written language, it was earlier than Greek.

But Phoenician is phonetic, it is a phonetic language.
And hieroglyphs were written from top to bottom and from right to left, or was it from left to right?

From right to left.

From right to left. Chaldean languages are written like that. Chinese and Japanese also. Only Aryan languages are written from left to right.
Much later, when this talk was first published, a disciple asked Mother what gave rise to these questions on hieroglyphs. It used to interest me very much once, to know about them. I tried to recall the memory of the elements which existed at that time, but I could not get any answer. There was a complete blank.

*Did you hear any sounds?*

(After a silence) Look, I'll give you an instance. About two years ago, I had a vision about Z's son.... She had brought him to me, he was not quite one year old, and I had just seen him there, in the room where I receive people. He gave me the impression of someone I knew very well, but I didn’t know who. And then, in the afternoon of the same day, I had a vision. A vision of ancient Egypt, that is to say, I was someone there, the great priestess or somebody — I don’t know who, for one doesn’t tell oneself “I am so and so”: the identification is complete, there is no objectifying, so I don’t know. I was in a wonderful building, immense! so high! but quite bare, there was nothing, except a place where there were magnificent paintings. So there I recognised the paintings of ancient Egypt. And I was coming out of my apartments and was entering a kind of large hall. There was a sort of gutter running all round the base of the walls, for collecting water. And then I saw the child, who was half naked, playing in it. And I was quite shocked, I said, “What! this is disgusting!” — but the feelings, ideas, all that was translated into French in my consciousness. There was the tutor who came, I had him called. I scolded him. I heard sounds. Well, I don’t know what I said, I don’t remember the sounds at all now. I heard the sounds I was articulating, I knew what they meant, but the translation was in French, and the sounds I could not remember. I spoke
to him, told him, “How can you let the child play in there?” And he answered me — and I woke up with his reply — saying — I did not hear the first words, but in my thought it was — “Amenhotep likes it.” I heard Amenhotep, I remembered. Then I knew the child was Amenhotep.

So I know that I spoke: I spoke a language but I don’t remember it now. I remembered “Amenhotep” because I know it in my waking consciousness: “Amenhotep.” But otherwise, the other sounds did not remain. I have no memory for sounds.

And I know I was his mother; at that moment I knew who I was, for I know Amenhotep is the son of so-and-so — besides, I looked up the history. Otherwise there is no connection: a blank.

I always admire those mediums — usually very simple people — who have the exact memory of the sound, who can tell you, “Look, I said this and this.” In that way one would have the phonetic notation. If I could remember the sounds I pronounced, we would have the notation, but I don’t.

I remember this conversation; suddenly I said to myself, “It would be so interesting if one could hear that language”, and then, from curiosity, “How did they discover the pronunciation? How?” Besides, all the names we were taught as children, in ancient history, have been changed today. They say they have discovered the sounds, or at least they claim to have discovered them. But I don’t know.

It is the same thing for ancient Babylon: I have extremely precise memories, completely objective, but when I speak I don’t remember the sounds I utter, there is only the mental translation. I have no memory for sounds.

I was wondering what had prompted all your questions.

It’s just that, it is that I am aware I have no memory for sounds. There are people who have a memory for sounds, I don’t have that memory. So I would be interested to know that. Otherwise I have always been able — when there was something of the
past which was doubtful for me, or interesting or incomplete — I have always found the means of making it come back to my consciousness. But sounds don’t come. It comes as a state of consciousness which is translated mentally, and so it is translated mentally into words which I know. So it is not at all interesting.

Even now, while I was playing music, the memory of the sounds was vague and incomplete. I had the memory of the sounds I heard in the “source of music” (with an upward gesture), and then, when the material music reproduced something of these sounds, I recognised them; but there is not that precision, that exactness which would make it possible for me to reproduce with the voice or with an instrument the exact sound. That is not there, that is missing. While the memory of the eyes was... it was stupefying. A thing I had seen just once — it was fixed, never forgotten.

Several times in this way, in visions — “visions”, actually memories: memories relived — I have spoken the language of that time, spoken it, heard myself speaking, but the sound has not remained. The sense of what I said has remained but the sound hasn’t.

It is a pity.