28 November 1956

“When we have passed beyond knowings, then we shall have Knowledge. Reason was the helper; Reason is the bar.

“When we have passed beyond willings, then we shall have Power. Effort was the helper; Effort is the bar.

“When we have passed beyond enjoyings, then we shall have Bliss. Desire was the helper; Desire is the bar.

“When we have passed beyond individualising, then we shall be real Persons. Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar.

“When we have passed beyond humanity, then we shall be the Man. The Animal was the helper; the Animal is the bar.”

Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 377

It is the same principle expressed in all the activities or aspects of the being.... It is obvious that in order to come out of the state of the original inconscience desire was indispensable, for without desire there would have been no awakening to activity. But once you are born into consciousness, this very desire which helped you to come out of the inconscience prevents you from liberating yourself from the bonds of matter and rising to a higher consciousness.

It is the same thing for the ego, the self. In order to pass on to a higher plane, one must first exist; and to exist one must become a conscious, separate individual, and to become a conscious separate individual, the ego is indispensable, otherwise one remains mingled with all that lies around us. But once the individuality is formed, if one wants to rise to a higher level and live a spiritual life, if one wants even to become simply
a higher type of man, the limitations of the ego are the worst obstacles, and the ego must be surpassed in order to enter the true consciousness.

And indeed, for the ordinary elementary life of man, all the qualities belonging to the animal nature, especially those of the body, were indispensable, otherwise man would not have existed. But when man has become a conscious, mental being, everything that binds him to his animal origin necessarily becomes a hindrance to progress and to the liberation of the being.

So, for everyone — except for those who are born free, and this is obviously very rare — for everyone this state of reason, of effort, desire, individualisation and solid physical balance in accordance with the ordinary mode of living is indispensable to begin with, until the time one becomes a conscious being, when one must give up all these things in order to become a spiritual being.

Now, has anybody a question to ask on the subject?

_Sweet Mother, when can one say that one is conscious?_

That is always a relative question. One is never altogether unconscious and one is never completely conscious. It is a progressive state.

But a time comes when instead of doing things automatically, impelled by a consciousness and force of which one is quite unaware — a time comes when one can observe what goes on in oneself, study one's movements, find their causes, and at the same time begin to exercise a control first over what goes on within us, then on the influence cast on us from outside which makes us act, in the beginning altogether unconsciously and almost involuntarily, but gradually more and more consciously; and the will can wake up and react. Then at that moment, the moment there is a conscious will capable of reacting, one may say, “I have become conscious.” This does not mean that it is a
total and perfect consciousness, it means that it is a beginning: for example, when one is able to observe all the reactions in one’s being and to have a certain control over them, to let those one approves of have play, and to control, stop, annul those one doesn’t approve of.

Besides, you must become aware within of something like a goal or a purpose or an ideal you want to realise; something other than the mere instinct which impels you to live without your knowing why or how. At that time you may say you are conscious, but it doesn’t mean you are perfectly conscious. And moreover, this perfection is so progressive that I believe nobody can say he is perfectly conscious; he is on the way to becoming perfectly conscious, but he isn’t yet.

_Sweet Mother, what kind of a state is it in which one has passed beyond all enjoyings?_

Well, it is a desireless state in which one lives — as Sri Aurobindo explains later — in an Ananda which has no cause, which does not depend on any circumstances, inner or outer, which is a permanent state, independent of the circumstances of life, causeless. One is in Ananda because one is in Ananda. And in fact it is simply because one has become aware of the divine Reality.

But one cannot feel the Ananda unless one has become desireless. If one has desires, all one feels is just pleasures and enjoyments, but that is not Ananda. Ananda has an altogether different nature and can only manifest in the being when the desires are abolished. So long as one is a being of desire, one cannot feel the Ananda; even were a force of Ananda to descend, it would immediately be falsified by the presence of desires.

_(Silence)_

_(Mother unfolds a sheet of paper.) Here I have a question_
Questions and Answers

referring to what we said last time about effort, personal effort. The question is this:

“In the inner life, why are there periods when one can no longer make a conscious effort, and if one enforces it, parts of the nature revolt or else everything in the being seems to become petrified; effort becomes the mechanical repetition of past movements. What should be done at such times?”

This has been very well observed. What is not mentioned here is the nature of the effort, for it is a certain kind of effort which leads to the result described here, which is either a revolt or a sort of — yes, petrifaction, truly, something that becomes absolutely insensible and no longer responds at all to this effort. This happens when the effort is almost exclusively mental and quite arbitrary, in the sense that it does not at all take into account the state of the rest of the being; it has its own idea, its own will, and without any consideration for the rest of the being, it imposes this will on the being as a whole. This is what usually brings about the revolt or the petrifaction. And the only thing to do is to make the mind quiet. And this is the time to make a movement of self-giving, full of peace, quietude, confidence. If one makes this movement of self-giving, of complete surrender to the divine Will, all the tension arising from the effort, an effort which could be called premature or unconsidered — all the tension arising from this effort gives way. There is a relaxation in the being. And the progress one could not make by this purely mental effort usually comes about almost automatically, by the very fact that one has relaxed in confidence and self-giving to the divine Will.

And then, this is what follows:

“At other times, one has the impression of making no effort, but of feeling only the presence of a consciousness
due to which in many circumstances of daily life a means of progress is found. One wonders then what effort is and what its value? What we call effort — isn’t it too mental a movement?”

That is exactly what I have just explained, which shows that the observation is quite correct.

It is an arbitrary decision of the mind, and being arbitrary and not in conformity with the truth of things, it naturally brings about these wrong reactions. This does not imply that no effort must ever be made but the effort also must be spontaneous. So too I told you once that for meditation to be effective, it must be a spontaneous meditation which takes hold of you rather than one you make an effort to have; well, effort, that kind of tension of the will in the being, must also be something spontaneous, and not the result of a more or less inopportune mental decision.

(Silence)

Any other question? No? No one has anything to say?

Mother, when one wants to go beyond the mind, if one lets go the mind acting (incorrect text)\(^1\) and the influence from above does not come immediately, then during that time what should one do? One becomes like an idiot.

(Laughter)

What do you mean exactly? I don’t understand.

If one lets go the mind acting...

If one lets the mind act? Why? I don’t understand your question.

\(^1\) The text, incorrectly spoken here by a child, and also the text of the following ten lines, has been slightly modified to give the approximate equivalent of the French. (Translator’s note)
Questions and Answers

You said at the beginning, “When one has gone beyond the mind”?

*In order to go beyond the mind...*

Oh! to go beyond the mind, let the mind act?... Yes, that is the theory: to go beyond desire, one must let the desires be realised, and to...

(A child) *He said “let go the mind acting”, Sweet Mother.*

Let go? Oh! but one can’t “let go the mind acting”, that’s not English.

*To stop the action of the mind.*

Ah, now we have it! that’s how you should have put it. So? To stop the action of the mind, is that it? The way to do it?

*I am asking...*

Naturally! But that is already difficult enough. So what are you asking?

*When one stops the reasoning, if something new from above doesn’t come immediately, then during that period sometimes...*

One acts like an idiot! *(Laughter)* Then it is better not to stop the reason before going beyond that state!

*I mean, in the conditions of life as it is, is it possible to be...*

To be unreasonable? Unfortunately that happens very often!
Is it possible to disregard reason?... It is possible only when you have passed beyond mental activity. It is possible only when you have achieved a surrender, a total giving of yourself. It is possible only when you no longer have any desires. So long as you have desires, have an ego and a will of your own, you cannot give up reason, because, as I said just a moment ago, you would become quite unbalanced and perhaps insane. Therefore reason must be the master until one has gone beyond the state in which it is useful. And as I said, as long as there is an ego and as long as there are desires, and so long as there are impulses and so long as there are passions and preferences, and so long as there are attractions and repulsions, etc., as long as all these things are there, reason is altogether useful.

I shall also add that there is another quite indispensable condition in order not to have recourse to reason any more; that is to open no door, no part of the being to the suggestions of the adverse forces. For if you are not completely liberated from the habit of responding to adverse suggestions, if you give up your reason, you also give up reason itself, that is, common sense. And you begin to act in an incoherent way which may finally become quite unbalanced. Well, to be free from suggestions and adverse influences, you must be exclusively under the influence of the Divine.

Now you see the problem; it is a little difficult. This means that unless you are in the presence of a completely illumined and transformed being, it is always better to advise people to act according to their reason. It is perhaps a limitation — it is in fact a great limitation — but it is also a control and it prevents you from becoming one of those half-idiots who are far too numerous in the world.

Reason is a very respectable person. Like all respectable people it has its limitations and prejudices, but that does not prevent it from being very useful. And it keeps you from making a fool of yourself. You would do many things if you did not have reason, things which would lead you straight to your ruin.
Questions and Answers

and could have extremely unfortunate consequences, for your best means of discernment until you have attained higher levels is reason. When one no longer listens to reason, one can be led into all sorts of absurdities. Naturally, it is neither the ideal nor the summit, it is only a kind of control and a guide for leading a good life, it keeps you from extravagances, excesses, inordinate passions and above all from those impulsive actions which may lead you to the abyss. There you are.

One must be very sure of oneself, quite free from the ego and perfectly surrendered to the divine Will to be able to do safely without reason.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between true and false reasons!

Ah! no, you are playing with words. That word, as you use it here, has altogether another meaning, altogether; they are two very different things. Reason is a faculty of discernment. You are speaking of the reasons you give yourself for doing one thing or another — these are excuses the mind gives itself; but the meaning of the word “reason” is quite different there, it is not the same word at all, though it is pronounced and written in the same way. You can look it up in your dictionary, it will give you two completely different definitions of the word “reason”. The reasons one gives oneself — that is, the excuses or explanations one gives oneself — are always tinged with egoism and a need to delude oneself that one is indeed a reasonable being. Ninety-nine and a half times out of a hundred this is the way to convince oneself that one is very good, what one does is very good, what one feels is very good, what one thinks is very good; it is to give oneself the impression that one is truly quite satisfactory. So, whatever you do, if you begin to reflect a little, you will tell yourself, “But certainly, I did that because it was like that, that’s the real reason; I felt like that, but it was because of this, that’s an excellent reason” — and so on. But that has nothing to do with
being reasonable; quite the contrary. It is an excellent means of deceiving oneself and keeping oneself from progressing. It is justifying oneself in one’s own eyes.

Moreover, these are always reasons which whitewash you and blacken others; it is a means of keeping your conscience very comfortable, isn’t it? What happens to you is the fault of circumstances, if you have made a mistake it is the fault of others, if you have a bad reaction it is others who are responsible, etc.; you emerge white as snow from the judgment of your mind.

Is that all?