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Sweet Mother, what does “mental honesty” mean exactly?

It is a mind that does not attempt to deceive itself. And in fact it is not an “attempt”, for it succeeds very well in doing it!

It would seem that in the ordinary psychological constitution of man, the almost constant function of the mind is to give an acceptable explanation of what goes on in the “desire-being”, the vital, the most material parts of the mind and the subtlest parts of the body. There is a kind of general complicity in all the parts of the being to give an explanation and even a comfortable justification for everything we do, in order to avoid as far as possible the painful impressions left by the mistakes we commit and undesirable movements. For instance, unless one has undergone or taken up a special training, whatever one does, the mind gives itself a favourable enough explanation of it, so that one is not troubled. Only under the pressure of outer reactions or circumstances or movements coming from other people, does one gradually consent to look less favourably at what one is and does, and begins to ask oneself whether things could not be better than they are.

Spontaneously, the first movement is what is known as self-defense. One puts oneself on one’s guard and quite spontaneously one wants a justification... for the smallest things, absolutely insignificant things — it is a normal attitude in life.

And explanations — one gives them to oneself; it is only under the pressure of circumstances that one begins to give them to others or to another, but first one makes oneself very comfortable; first thing: “It was like that, for it had to be like that, and it happened because of this, and...”, and it is always the fault of circumstances or other people. And it truly requires an effort
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— unless, as I say, one has undergone a discipline, has acquired the habit of doing it automatically — it requires an effort to begin to understand that perhaps things are not like this, that perhaps one has not done exactly what one ought to have done or reacted as one should. And even when one begins to see it, a much greater effort is needed to recognise it... officially.

When one begins to see that one has made a mistake, the first movement of the mind is to push it into the background and to put a cloak in front of it, the cloak of a very fine little explanation, and as long as one is not obliged to show it, one hides it. And this is what I call “lack of mental honesty”.

First, one deceives oneself by habit, but even when one begins not to deceive oneself, instinctively there is a movement of trying, trying to deceive oneself in order to feel comfortable. And so a still greater step is necessary once one has understood that one was deceiving oneself, to confess frankly, “Yes, I was deceiving myself.”

All these things are so habitual, so automatic, as it were, that you are not even aware of them; but when you begin to want to establish some discipline over your being, you make discoveries which are really tremendously interesting. When you have discovered this, you become aware that you are living constantly in a... the best word is “self-deception”, a state of wilful deceit; that is, you deceive yourself spontaneously. It is not that you need to reflect: spontaneously you put a pretty cloak over what you have done so that it doesn’t show its true colours... and all this for things which are so insignificant, which have so little importance! It would be understandable, wouldn’t it, if recognising your mistake had serious consequences for your very existence — the instinct of self-preservation would make you do it as a protection — but that is not the question, it concerns things which are absolutely unimportant, of no consequence at all except that of having to tell yourself, “I have made a mistake.”

This means that an effort is needed in order to be mentally
sincere. There must be an effort, there must be a discipline. Of course, I am not speaking of those who tell lies in order not to be caught, for everybody knows that this should not be done. Besides, the most stupid lies are the most useless, for they are so flagrant that they can't deceive anyone. Such examples occur constantly; you catch someone doing something wrong and tell him, “That’s how it is”; he gives a silly explanation which nobody can understand, nobody can accept; it is silly but he gives it in the hope of shielding himself. It is spontaneous, you see, but he knows this is not done. But the other kind of deception is much more spontaneous and it is so habitual that one is not aware of it. So, when we speak of mental honesty, we speak of something which is acquired by a very constant and sustained effort.

You catch yourself, don’t you, you suddenly catch yourself in the act of giving yourself somewhere in your head or here (Mother indicates the heart), here it is more serious... giving a very favourable little explanation. And only when you can get a grip on yourself, there, hold fast and look at yourself clearly in the face and say, “Do you think it is like that?”, then, if you are very courageous and put a very strong pressure, in the end you tell yourself, “Yes, I know very well that it is not like that!”

It sometimes takes years. Time must pass, one must have changed much within oneself, one’s vision of things must have become different, one must be in a different condition, in a different relation with circumstances, in order to see clearly, completely, how far one was deceiving oneself — and at that moment one was convinced that one was sincere.

(Silence)

It is probable that perfect sincerity can only come when one rises above this sphere of falsehood that is life as we know it on earth, mental life, even the higher mental life.

When one springs up into the higher sphere, into the world
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of Truth, one will be able to see things as they truly are, and seeing them as they are, one will be able to live them in their truth. Then all falsehoods will naturally crumble. And since the favourable explanations will no longer have any purpose, they will disappear, for there will be nothing left to explain.

Things will be self-evident, Truth will shine through all forms, the possibility of error will disappear.