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“Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine. But like other powers of the Divine it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego or held by Asuric influences and perverted to their purpose. This is indeed one of the three forces — power, wealth, sex — that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them.... For this reason most spiritual disciplines ... proclaim poverty and bareness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is an error; it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the divine life is the supramental way for the sadhaka.”

Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, pp. 11-12

How can one know if one’s way of using money is in accordance with the divine Will?

One must first know what the divine Will is. But there is a surer way — to surrender money for the divine work, if one is not sure oneself. “Divinely” means at the service of the Divine — it means not to use money for one’s own satisfaction but to place it at the Divine’s service.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of “a weak bondage to the habits that the possession of riches creates”.

Ibid., p. 14
When you are rich and have a lot of money to spend, generally you spend it on things you find pleasant, and you become habituated to these things, attached to these things, and if one day the money is gone, you miss it, you are unhappy, you are miserable and feel all lost because you no longer have what you were in the habit of having. It is a bondage, a weak attachment. He who is quite detached, when he lives in the midst of these things, it is well with him; when these things are gone, it is well also; he is totally indifferent to both. That is the right attitude: when it is there he uses it, when it is not he does without it. And for his inner consciousness this makes no difference. That surprises you, but it is like that.

*If one has the power to acquire a lot of money, does this mean that one has a certain control over terrestrial forces?*

This depends upon how one acquires it. If you get it by foul ways, that does not mean that you have a control. But if someone, scrupulously doing his duty, sees that money comes to him, it is evidently because he exercises a control over these forces. There are people who have the power of attracting money and they haven’t the least need to practise dishonesty to get it. Others, even to get a few pennies, must make all sorts of contrivances, more or less clean. So one cannot say.... We see a rich man and think he must be exercising a control over the forces of money — no, not necessarily. But if a man remains perfectly honest and does what he thinks is his duty without caring to acquire money, and yet money comes to him, evidently he has a certain affinity with those forces.

*It is said, “One cannot make a heap without making a hole”, one cannot enrich oneself without impoverishing someone else. Is this true?*
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This is not correct. If one produces something, instead of an impoverishment it is an enrichment; simply one puts into circulation in the world something else having a value equivalent to that of money. But to say that one cannot make a heap without making a hole is all right for those who speculate, who do business on the Stock Exchange or in finance — there it is true. It is impossible to have a financial success in affairs of pure speculation without its being detrimental to another. But it is limited to this. Otherwise a producer does not make a hole if he heaps up money in exchange for what he produces. Surely there is the question of the value of the production, but if the production is truly an acquisition for the general human wealth, it does not make a hole, it increases this wealth. And in another way, not only in the material field, the same thing holds for art, for literature or science, for any production at all.

When I was doing business (export-import), I always had the feeling of robbing my neighbour.

This is living at the expense of others, because one multiplies the middlemen. Naturally, it is perhaps convenient, practical, but from the general point of view, and above all in the way it is practised, it is living at the expense of the producer and the consumers. One becomes an agent, not at all with the idea of rendering service (because there is not one in a million who has this idea), but because it is an easy way of earning money without making any effort. But of course, among the ways of making money without any effort, there are others much worse than that! They are countless.

Friends from outside have often asked me this question: “When one is compelled to earn his living, should one just conform to the common code of honesty or should one be still more strict?”
This depends upon the attitude your friend has taken in life. If he wants to be a sadhak, it is indispensable that rules of ordinary morality do not have any value for him. Now, if he is an ordinary man living the ordinary life, it is a purely practical question, isn’t it? He must conform to the laws of the country in which he lives to avoid all trouble! But all these things which in ordinary life have a very relative value and can be looked upon with a certain indulgence, change totally the minute one decides to do yoga and enter the divine life. Then, all values change completely; what is honest in ordinary life, is no longer at all honest for you. Besides, there is such a reversal of values that one can no longer use the same ordinary language. If one wants to consecrate oneself to the divine life, one must do it truly, that is, give oneself entirely, no longer do anything for one’s own interest, depend exclusively upon the divine Power to which one abandons oneself. Everything changes completely, doesn’t it? — everything, everything, it is a reversal. What I have just read from this book applies solely to those who want to do yoga; for others it has no meaning, it is a language which makes no sense, but for those who want to do yoga it is imperative. It is always the same thing in all that we have recently read: one must be careful not to have one foot on one side and the other foot on the other, not to stand in two different boats each following its own course. This is what Sri Aurobindo said: one must not lead a “double life”. One must give up one thing or the other — one can’t follow both.

This does not mean, however, that one is obliged to get out of the conditions of one’s life: it is the inner attitude which must be totally changed. One may do what one is in the habit of doing, but do it with quite a different attitude. I don’t say it is necessary to give up everything in life and go away into solitude, to an ashram necessarily, to do yoga. Now, it is true that if one does yoga in the world and in worldly circumstances, it is more difficult, but it is also more complete. Because, every minute one must face problems which do not present themselves
to someone who has left everything and gone into solitude; for such a one these problems are reduced to a minimum — while in life one meets all sorts of difficulties, beginning with the incomprehension of those around you with whom you have to deal; one must be ready for that, be armed with patience, and a great indifference. But in yoga one should no longer care for what people think or say; it is an absolutely indispensable starting-point. You must be absolutely immune to what the world may say or think of you and to the way it treats you. People’s understanding must be something quite immaterial to you and should not even slightly touch you. That is why it is generally much more difficult to remain in one’s usual surroundings and do yoga than to leave everything and go into solitude; it is much more difficult, but we are not here to do easy things — easy things we leave to those who do not think of transformation.

*If someone has acquired a lot of money by dishonest means, could some of it be asked for the Divine?*

Sri Aurobindo has answered this question. He says that money in itself is an impersonal force: the way in which you acquire money concerns you alone personally. It may do you great harm, it may harm others also, but it does not in any way change the nature of the money which is an altogether impersonal force: money has no colour, no taste, no psychological consciousness. It is a force. It is like saying that the air breathed out by a scoundrel is more tainted than that breathed out by an honest man — I don’t think so. I think the result is the same. One may for reasons of a practical nature refuse money which has been stolen, but that is for altogether practical reasons, it is not because of divine reasons. This is a purely human idea. One may from a practical point of view say, “Ah! No, the way in which you have acquired this money is disgusting and so I don’t want to offer it to the Divine”, because one has a human consciousness. But if you take someone (let us suppose the worst) who has killed and acquired
money by the murder; if all of a sudden he is seized by terrible scruples and remorse and tells himself, “I have only one thing to do with this money, give it where it can be utilised for the best, in the most impersonal way”, it seems to me that this movement is preferable to utilising it for one’s own satisfaction. I said that the reasons which could prevent one from receiving ill-gotten money may be reasons of a purely practical kind, but there may also be more profound reasons, of a (I do not want to say moral but) spiritual nature, from the point of view of tapasya; one may tell somebody, “No, you cannot truly acquire merit with this fortune which you have obtained in such a terrible way; what you can do is to restore it”, one may feel that a restitution, for instance, will help one to make more progress than simply passing the money on to any work whatever. One may see things in this way — one can’t make rules. This is what I never stop telling you: it is impossible to make a rule. In every case it is different. But you must not think that the money is affected; money as a terrestrial force is not affected by the way in which it is obtained, that can in no way affect it. Money remains the same, your note remains the same, your piece of gold remains the same, and as it carries its force, its force remains there. It harms only the person who has done wrong, that is evident. Then the question remains: in what state of mind and for what reasons does your dishonest man want to pass on his money to a work he considers divine? Is it as a measure of safety, through prudence or to lay his heart at rest? Evidently this is not a very good motive and it cannot be encouraged, but if he feels a kind of repentance and regret for what he has done and the feeling that there is but one thing to do and that is precisely to deprive himself of what he has wrongly acquired and utilise it for the general good as much as possible, then there is nothing to say against that. One cannot decide in a general way — it depends upon the instance. Only, if I understand well what you mean, if one knows that a man has acquired money by the most unspeakable means, obviously, it would not be good to go and ask him for money
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for some divine work, because that would be like “redeeming” his way of gaining money. One cannot ask, that is not possible. If, spontaneously, for some reason, he gives it, there is no reason to refuse it. But it is quite impossible to go and ask him for it, because it is as though one legitimised his manner of acquiring money. That makes a great difference.

And generally, in these cases, those who go and ask money from rascals use means of intimidation: they frighten them, not physically but about their future life, about what may happen to them, they give them a fright. It is not very nice. These are procedures one ought not to use.

_Besides money, what are the other divine powers “delegated” here on earth?_

All. All the divine powers are manifested here and deformed here — light, life, love, force — all — harmony, ananda — all, all, there is nothing which is not divine in its origin and which does not exist here under a completely distorted, travestied form. The other day we had spoken at length about the way in which divine Love is deformed in its manifestation here, it is the same thing.

_How can money be reconquered for the Mother?_

Ah!... There is a hint here. Three things are interdependent (Sri Aurobindo says here): power, money and sex. I believe the three are interdependent and that all three have to be conquered to be sure of having any one — when you want to conquer one you must have the other two. Unless one has mastered these three things, desire for power, desire for money and desire for sex, one cannot truly possess any of them firmly and surely. What gives so great an importance to money in the world as it is today is not so much money itself, for apart from a few fools who heap up money and are happy because they can heap it up and count
it, generally money is desired and acquired for the satisfactions it brings. And this is almost reciprocal: each of these three things not only has its own value in the world of desires, but leans upon the other two. I have related to you that vision, that big black serpent which kept watch over the riches of the world, terrestrial wealth — he demanded the mastery of the sex-impulse. Because, according to certain theories, the very need of power has its end in this satisfaction, and if one mastered that, if one abolished that from human consciousness, much of the need for power and desire for money would disappear automatically. Evidently, these are the three great obstacles in the terrestrial human life and, unless they are conquered, there is scarcely a chance for humanity to change.

Does an individual mastery over desire suffice or is a general, collective mastery necessary?

Ah! There we are.... Is it possible to attain a total personal transformation without there being at least a correspondence in the collectivity?... This does not seem possible to me. There is such an interdependence between the individual and the collectivity that, unless one does what the ascetics have preached, that is, escapes from the world, goes out of it completely, leaves it where it is and runs away selfishly leaving all the work to others, unless one does that.... And even so I have my doubts. Is it possible to accomplish a total transformation of one’s being so long as the collectivity has not reached at least a certain degree of transformation? I don’t think so. Human nature remains what it is — one can attain a great change of consciousness, that yes, one can purify one’s consciousness, but the total conquest, the material transformation depends definitely to a large extent, on a certain degree of progress in the collectivity. Buddha said with reason that as long as you have in you a vibration of desire, this vibration will spread in the world and all those who are ready to receive it will receive it. In the same way, if you have in you the
least receptivity to a vibration of desire, you will be open to all the vibrations of desire which circulate constantly in the world. And that is why he concluded: Get out of this illusion, withdraw entirely and you will be free. I find this relatively very selfish, but after all, that was the only way he had foreseen. There is another: to identify oneself so well with the divine Power as to be able to act constantly and consciously upon all vibrations circulating through the world. Then the undesirable vibrations no longer have any effect upon you, but you have an effect upon them, that is, instead of an undesirable vibration entering into you without being perceived and doing its work there, it is perceived and immediately on its arrival you act upon it to transform it, and it goes back into the world transformed, to do its beneficent work and prepare others for the same realisation. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo proposes to do and, more clearly, what he asks you to do, what he intends us to do:

Instead of running away, to bring into oneself the power which can conquer.

Note that things are arranged in such a way that if the tiniest atom of ambition remained and one wanted this Power for one’s personal satisfaction, one could never have it, that Power would never come. Its deformed limitations, of the kind seen in the vital and physical world, those yes, one may have them, and there are many people who have them, but the true Power, the Power Sri Aurobindo calls “supramental”, unless one is absolutely free from all egoism under all its forms, one will never be able to manifest. So there is no danger of its being misused. It will not manifest except through a being who has attained the perfection of a complete inner detachment. I have told you, this is what Sri Aurobindo expects us to do — you may tell me it is difficult, but I repeat that we are not here to do easy things, we are here to do difficult ones.