17 September 1958

“An intellectual approach to the highest knowledge, the mind’s possession of it, is an indispensable aid to this movement of Nature in the human being. Ordinarily, on our surface, man’s chief instrument of thought and action is the reason, the observing, understanding and arranging intellect. In any total advance or evolution of the Spirit, not only the intuition, insight, inner sense, the heart’s devotion, a deep and direct life-experience of the things of the Spirit have to be developed, but the intellect also must be enlightened and satisfied; our thinking and reflecting mind must be helped to understand, to form a reasoned and systematised idea of the goal, the method, the principles of this highest development and activity of our nature and the truth of all that lies behind it. Spiritual realisation and experience, an intuitive and direct knowledge, a growth of inner consciousness, a growth of the soul and of an intimate soul-perception, soul-vision and a soul-sense, are indeed the proper means of this evolution: but the support of the reflective and critical reason is also of great importance; if many can dispense with it, because they have a vivid and direct contact with inner realities and are satisfied with experience and insight, yet in the whole movement it is indispensable. If the supreme truth is a spiritual Reality, then the intellect of man needs to know what is the nature of that original Truth and the principle of its relations to the rest of existence, to ourselves and the universe. The intellect is not capable by itself of bringing us into touch with the concrete spiritual reality, but it can help by a mental formulation of the truth of the Spirit which explains it to the mind and can be applied even in the more direct
Questions and Answers

seeking: this help is of a capital importance.”

The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 877–78

Sweet Mother, here Sri Aurobindo writes: “An intellectual approach to the highest knowledge, the mind’s possession of it...” How is this possible?

Everything that happens to us in the spiritual world we always have a tendency to translate mentally; we want to explain it to ourselves, draw conclusions from it, change the experience into a rule of action, profit mentally by what has happened in order to transform the experience into something practically useful. That is what Sri Aurobindo calls “the mind’s possession of it”. This is done automatically, so to say. Unfortunately, the best part of the experience always escapes; and besides, if one wants to keep it intact, one would have to remain in a state in which the experience is not mentalised, and if one lives in the outer world this is practically impossible. That is why those who wished to enjoy their spiritual experience without intervention from the mind used to remain in states of trance and to carefully avoid coming down to the level of action. But if one wants to transform life, if one wants the spiritual experience to have an effect on the mind, the vital and the body, on the daily activities, it is indispensable to try to express it mentally and accept the inevitable diminution, until the mind itself is transformed and capable of participating in the experience without deforming it.

What we want to do is still more difficult, for we want the vital also to be transformed and capable of participating in the experience without deforming it, and finally the physical itself, the body, to be transformed by the spiritual action and no longer be an obstacle to the experience.

This transformation is precisely the point that ordinary thought finds most difficult to accept, for it is almost the faculty of thought itself which must be changed. Its whole functioning has to be changed for this transformation to be possible, and we
are so used to identifying the faculty with its functioning that we wonder if it is possible to think otherwise than in the way we ordinarily do.

It is possible only when one has had the experience of complete silence in the mental region and when the spiritual force with its light and power descends through the mind and makes it act directly without its following its usual method of analysis, deduction, reasoning. All these faculties which are usually considered the normal activities of the mind, must be stopped, and yet the spiritual Light, Knowledge and Power must be able to transform them into a channel of direct expression, without using these means to express themselves.

The mind, in its outermost form, is a means of action, an instrument for organisation and execution. It puts concepts in order, relates them to one another, draws conclusions for action from them and gives impulse to this action. This power of organisation and impulse to action can be produced directly by the spiritual force which takes hold of the mental consciousness without these processes of analysis, deduction, reasoning being necessary. In intuition things already happen somewhat in this way; but spiritual intervention is, as it were, a super-intuition, a direct expression of the vision, of the experience, of knowledge by identity.

(Silence)

There are many stages in this transformation and the first are like a kind of mental imitation of the movement. The whole process of analysis, reasoning, deduction and formulation of conclusions occurs almost spontaneously in a mental background and gives us the result which seems to us an intuition but which is still the result of all that work which was carried out very swiftly and, as I said, in a sort of background of which we are not fully conscious, so that we see the starting-point and the result without following the whole process in detail, the whole development
of the mental activity. People who have a very quick mind and
can grasp things very fast, people whose mental activity is ex-
tremely swift, immediate, can give the impression that they have
intuition but this is only an outer form and almost an imitation
of true intuition. Intuition is already a direct vision, something
that dispenses with reasoning and deduction. Through intuition
there is already an expression of direct knowledge.

But before reaching this stage, all the experiences one has
must pass through the ordinary mental method of observation,
analysis and deduction in order to reach the outer consciousness.
The very essence of the experience fades away and there remains
only a sort of very dry husk which has lost all its power of
realisation — almost, almost lost it.

But those whose intellectual activity is very dominant find it
almost absolutely necessary to catch hold of everything, all inner
experiences, and to begin to formulate them. If, in addition, they
have a power of expression, they try to formulate them in words
and sentences; and when one has lived these experiences and
becomes aware of the descending curve, one sees at each stage
the deep reality of the experience withdrawing, fading into the
background, instead of being in the forefront and commanding
the whole being; it retreats slowly like this (gesture), and outside
there remains only something... which is a kind of dry and cold
imitation. It may be expressed in very enthusiastic words, but in
comparison with what the thing itself was, in itself, in its deep
truth, it is so shrivelled up, diminished.... All the true joy, the
true beauty, the inner enthusiasm, that wonderful warmth of the
experience — all this retreats far behind. You try to keep a hold
on it, but it eludes you. And you pay dearly for this power of
formulation.

_Mother, in our life here, what do we mean by the “de-
velopment of the mind”? And how is it useful?_

I believe I have already explained this to you once. I think I have
even explained it in detail in the articles on education. It is quite similar to the results of physical education for the body.

We have limbs and muscles and nerves, indeed everything that constitutes the body; if we don’t give them a special development, a special education, all these things do what they can to express the Power in the body, but it is a very clumsy and very incomplete expression. It is beyond question that a physical body which has been trained according to the most complete and rational methods of physical culture is capable of things it could never do otherwise. I think no one can deny that. Well, for the mind it is the same thing. You have a mental instrument with many possibilities, faculties, but they are latent and need a special education, a special training so that they can express the Light. It is certain that in ordinary life the brain is the seat of the outer expression of the mental consciousness; well, if this brain is not developed, if it is crude, there are innumerable things which cannot be expressed, because they do not have the instrument required to express themselves. It would be like a musical instrument with most of its notes missing, and that produces a rough approximation but not something precise.

Mental culture, intellectual education changes the constitution of your brain, enlarges it considerably, and as a result the expression becomes more complete and more precise.

It is not necessary if you want to escape from life and go into inexpressible heights, but it is indispensable if you want to express your experience in outer life.

_Mother, you said that if one develops these faculties of analysis, deduction and all that too much, they become obstacles to spiritual experiences, no?_

If they are not controlled, mastered, yes. But not necessarily. Not necessarily. It might make the control a little more difficult, for naturally it is more difficult to master an individualised being than a crude one — with a completer individualisation the
Questions and Answers

ego becomes more crystallised and also self-satisfied, doesn’t it?... But granting that this difficulty has been overcome, well, in a highly developed individuality the result is infinitely superior to the one obtained in a crude and uneducated nature. I am not saying that the process of transformation or rather of consecration is not more difficult but once it is achieved the result is far superior.

This may very well be compared with musical instruments, one of which has a certain number of notes and the other ten times as many. Well, it is perhaps easier to play an instrument of four or five notes but the music that could be played on a complete keyboard is obviously far superior!

One could even compare this to an orchestra much more than to a simple instrument. A human being, a fully developed human individuality is very much like one of those stupendous orchestras which has hundreds and hundreds of players. It is obviously very difficult to control and conduct them but the result can be marvellous.