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“The beings of the vital world are powerful by their very nature; when to their power they add knowledge, they become doubly dangerous. There is nothing to be done with these creatures; you should avoid having any dealings with them unless you have the power to crush and destroy them. If you are forced into contact with them, beware of the spell they can cast. These vital beings, when they manifest on the physical plane, have always a great hypnotic power; for the centre of their consciousness is in the vital world and not in the material and they are not veiled or dwarfed by the material consciousness as human beings are.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (12 May 1929)

Mother, you say: “These beings are very powerful”; what kind of power have they?

The power that the vital has over Matter. And, in fact, you can do nothing without the vital power. If there were no vital power, Matter would be inert and unconscious. The vital power is what men usually call “power” in short.

Cannot the vital power be replaced by some other higher power?

No. The vital must be transformed. I have always said that nothing can be done without the vital, but the vital must be converted; that is, instead of being an instrument of those beings, it should become an instrument of the divine will. One can do nothing in the physical world without the vital. It is exactly here that the error of the ascetics lies; as they know it is
a power full of desires and indeed full of the need of realising itself, they abolish it, so deaden it that it exists no longer. All ascetic methods are invented for abolishing and deadening the vital. For that evidently is the most convenient way of cutting off all connection with material life: one becomes worse than a vegetative kind of being.

What is needed is that the vital, instead of serving its own ends or being an instrument of anti-divine forces, should become an instrument of the Divine and put all its force at the service of the Divine. This is quite possible.

*When we are afraid, is that due to the mischief of these beings?*

Yes, my child. Fear is the prettiest gift these beings have given to the world. It is their first present, and the most powerful. It is through fear that they hold human beings. First of all, they create a movement of fear; the movement of fear weakens you, then hands you over little by little into their power. And it is not even a reasonable fear; it is a kind of fear which seizes you, you don’t know why, something that makes you tremble, gives you anxiety. You do not know why, it has no apparent reason. It is their action.

*When one feels frightened, what should one do?*

That depends upon who you are. There are many ways of curing oneself of fear.

If you have some contact with your psychic being, you must call it immediately and in the psychic light put things back in order. This is the most powerful way.

When one does not have this psychic contact, but is still a reasonable being, that is, when one has a free movement of the reasoning mind, one can use it to reason with, to speak to oneself as one would to a child, explaining that this fear is a bad thing
in itself and, even if there is a danger, to face the danger with fear is the greatest stupidity. If there is a real danger, it is only with the power of courage that you have a chance of coming out of it; if you have the least fear, you are done for. So with that kind of reasoning, manage to convince the part that fears that it must stop being afraid.

If you have faith and are consecrated to the Divine, there is a very simple way, it is to say: "Let Your will be done. Nothing can frighten me because it is You who are guiding my life. I belong to You and You are guiding my life." That acts immediately. Of all the means this is the most effective: indeed, it is. That is, one must be truly consecrated to the Divine. If one has that, it acts immediately; all fear vanishes immediately like a dream. And the being with the bad influence also disappears like a dream along with the fear. You should see it running away at full speed, prrt! Voilà.

Now, there are people having a strong vital power in them and they are fighters who immediately lift up their heads and say: "Ah! an enemy is here, we are going to knock him down." But for that one must have the knowledge and a very great vital power. One must be vitally a giant. That does not happen to everyone.

So there are many different ways. They are all good, if you know how to make use of the one that suits your own nature.

In gymnastics when I want to take a jump and feel frightened, why does this happen?

Ah! there, my children, it depends.... You must distinguish two very different things and you must deal with them very differently.

If it is a vital fear, you must reason with yourself and go about it all the same. But if it is a physical instinct (that is possible, it happens very often that there is a kind of physical instinct), in that case you must listen to it, for the instinct of the
body is a very sure thing, if it is not disturbed by thought or vital will. The body left to itself knows very well what it can and what it cannot do. And not only that but even a thing that one can do and does usually, if one day you feel a sort of repulsion, as if you were shrinking back, you must definitely not do it; it is an indication that for some reason or other — a purely material reason of a disorder in the functioning of the body — you are not fit to do the thing at that time. Then you must not do it. In that case, it is not even a fear, it is something that shrinks, that withdraws, there is nothing in the head, it does not correspond to any kind of thought like: “What is going to happen?” When the head starts working and you say: “What is going to happen?”, you must sweep it away because it is worth nothing; you must use all the means of reason and good sense you have to drive that away. But if it is a purely physical sensation, as though something were contracting, a kind of physical repugnance, if the body itself is refusing, so to say, you should never force it, never, because it is usually when you force it that there’s an accident. That may very well be a kind of premonition that there’s going to be an accident, that if you do the thing, you will not go far. And in such a case you must not do it. You must not put into it the least *amour-propre*. You must realise: “Today I am not in a good condition.”

But if it is a vital fear, if for example you have a competition or a tournament, and you felt this kind of fear and then: “What is going to happen?”, you must sweep it away quickly, it means nothing.

*But sometimes, it is laziness that prevents us from doing a thing.*

Ah! if you are tamasic, that is yet something else. If you have a tamasic nature, you must use another procedure. You must exert your consciousness, your will, your force, gather your energy, shake yourself a little and whip yourself and say: “Hup! hup! 
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forward, march.” If it is laziness that keeps you back from, say, doing the vaulting, you must immediately do something much more tiring and say: “Well, you don’t want to do that? All right, you are going to do 1500 metres running!” Or else: “I don’t want to do the weight-lifting today, I don’t feel like doing it: good, I shall do skipping 4000 times at a stretch.”

The same method should be used for studies also?

Yes, exactly. If you don’t feel like learning your lesson, you take a book ten times more tiring, something dry and compel yourself to read it with attention. There are books of this kind, so dry, of such an arid kind of knowledge... Well, if you don’t feel like reading your book of history or geography, which are after all very easy and very entertaining, instead of that take one of those books that are given to you (Mother looks at a teacher) — I do not dare to say anything, because your teacher is there! — extremely arid, and compel yourself to study at least half the book. Afterwards, everything else appears charming to you.

Would it not be better to continue the work even if one feels lazy?

That depends on the work; there we enter another domain.

If it is a work that you are doing for the collectivity and not for yourself personally, then you must do it, whatever happens. It is an elementary discipline. You have undertaken to do this work or have been given the work and have taken it up, therefore you have accepted it, and in that case you must do it. At all times, unless you are absolutely ill, ill in the last degree and unable to move, you must do it. Even if you are rather ill, you must do it. An unselfish work always cures you of your petty personal maladies. Naturally, if you are really compelled to be in bed without being able to move, with a terrible fever or a very serious illness, then that’s quite different. But otherwise, if
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you are just a little indisposed: “I am not feeling quite well, I have a little headache or I have indigestion, or I have a bad cold, I am coughing”, things like that — then doing your work, not thinking of yourself, thinking of the work, doing it as well as you can, that puts you right immediately.

In reality illness is only a disequilibrium; if then you are able to establish another equilibrium, this disequilibrium disappears. An illness is simply, always, in every case, even when the doctors say that there are microbes — in every case, a disequilibrium in the being: a disequilibrium among the various functions, a disequilibrium among the forces.

This is not to say that there are no microbes: there are, there are many more microbes than are known now. But it is not because of that you are ill, for they are always there. It happens that they are always there and for days they do nothing to you and then all of a sudden, one day, one of them gets hold of you and makes you ill — why? Simply because the resistance was not as it used to be habitually, because there was some disequilibrium in some part, the functioning was not normal. But if, by an inner power, you can re-establish the equilibrium, then that’s the end, there is no more difficulty, the disequilibrium disappears.

There is no other way of curing people. It is simply when one sees the disequilibrium and is capable of re-establishing the equilibrium that one is cured. Only there are two very different categories you come across... Some hold on to their disequilibrium — they hold on to it, cling to it, don’t want to let it go. Then you may try as hard as you will, even if you re-establish the equilibrium the next minute they get into disequilibrium once again, because they love that. They say: “Oh no! I don’t want to be ill”, but within them there is something which holds firmly to some disequilibrium, which does not want to let it go. There are other people, on the contrary, who sincerely love equilibrium, and directly you give them the power to get back their equilibrium, the equilibrium is re-established and in a few minutes they are
cured. Their knowledge was not sufficient or their power was not sufficient to re-establish order — disequilibrium is a disorder. But if you intervene, if you have the knowledge and re-establish the equilibrium, quite naturally the illness will disappear; and those who allow you to do it get cured. Only those who do not let you do it are not cured and this is visible, they do not allow you to act, they cling to the illness. I tell them: “Ah! you are not cured? Go to the doctor then.” And the funniest part of the thing is that most often they believe in the doctors, although the working remains the same! Every doctor who is something of a philosopher will tell you: “It is like that; we doctors give only the occasion, but it is the body that cures itself. When the body wants to be cured, it is cured.” Well, there are bodies that do not allow equilibrium to be re-established unless they are made to absorb some medicine or something very definite which gives them the feeling that they are being truly looked after. But if you give them a very precise, very exact treatment that is sometimes very difficult to follow, they begin to be convinced that there is nothing better to do than to regain the equilibrium and they get back the equilibrium!

I knew a doctor who was a neurologist and treated illnesses of the stomach. He used to say that all illnesses of the stomach came from a more or less bad nervous state. He was a doctor for the rich and it was the rich and unoccupied people who went to him. So they used to come and tell him: “I have a pain in the stomach, I cannot digest”, and this and that. They had terrible pains, they had headache, they had, well, all the symptoms! He used to listen to them very seriously. I knew a lady who went to him and to whom he said: “Ah! your case is very serious. But on which floor do you live? On the groundfloor? All right. This is what you have to do to cure your illness of the stomach. Take a bunch of fully ripe grapes (do not take your breakfast, for breakfast upsets your stomach), take a bunch of grapes; hold it in your hand, like this, very carefully. Then prepare to go out — not by your door, never go out by your door! You must go
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out by the window. Get a stool. And go out by the window. Go out in the street, and there you must walk while eating one grape every two steps— not more, yes, not more! You will have stomach-ache! One single grape every two steps. You must take two steps, then eat one single grape and you should continue till there are no more grapes. Do not turn back, go straight on till there are no more grapes. You must take a big bunch. And when you have finished, you may return quietly. But do not take a conveyance! Come back on foot, otherwise the whole trouble will return. Come back quietly and I give you the guarantee that if you do that every day, at the end of three days you will be cured.” And in fact this lady was cured!

(A child) Sometimes there is a lot of work. One does not know what to do.

A lot of work... Truly a lot of work?

Many kinds of work. For example, in our studies, we have many subjects to read.

What do you do the whole day, from morning till evening? How much time do you devote to your toilet, to take your bath, to dress? Approximately, not exactly to a minute.

About three quarters of an hour.

How much time do you take for eating?

Fifteen minutes.

Every time? How many times per day? Four? All right. How much time do you spend in gossiping?... That you don’t know!
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I don’t gossip.

You don’t gossip! You are a marvel, indeed. I shall put you on a pedestal. You don’t gossip?

Yes, I gossip, but when I have work, I don’t gossip.

Yes. And how many hours per day do you need to work to be able to do your tasks?

In the morning sometimes I get up at half-past four.

To do your home-work? You are still half asleep, aren’t you, at half-past four? Are you quite awake?... No! Ah! And then, you start working immediately?

Yes, sometimes.

Because I am leading exactly towards that... When you work, if you are able to concentrate, you can do absolutely in ten minutes what would otherwise take you one hour. If you want to gain time, learn to concentrate. It is through attention that one can do things quickly and one does them much better. If you have a task that should take you half an hour — I don’t say if you have to write for half an hour of course — but if you have to think and your mind is floating about, if you are thinking not only of what you are doing but also of what you have done and of what you will have to do and of your other subjects, all that makes you lose thrice as much time as you need to do your task. When you have too much to do, you must learn how to concentrate exclusively on what you are doing, with an intensity in your attention, and you can do in ten minutes what would otherwise take you one hour.

So I do not know, I cannot decide without full knowledge of the matter, if you have too much work, unless you bring me
all the work you have to do; but I do not believe that you are overburdened with work. I say I do not believe it. Now, I do not assert this because I do not know what all the teachers do. But in any case, if you have much to do, you must learn how to concentrate much, all the more, and when you are doing a thing, to think of that only, and focus all your energy upon what you do. You gain at least half the time. So if you tell me: “I have too much work”, I answer: “You do not concentrate enough.”

(Another child) *For a mathematical problem, sometimes the solution comes quickly, sometimes it takes too long.*

Yes, it is exactly that: it depends on the degree of concentration. If you observe yourself, you will notice this quite well: when it does not come, it is because of a kind of haziness in the brain, something cloudy, like a fog somewhere, and then you are there as in a dream. You push forward trying to find it, and it is as though you were pushing into cotton-wool, you do not see clearly there; and so nothing comes. You may remain in that state for hours.

Concentration consists precisely in removing the cloud. You gather together all the elements of your intelligence and fix them on one point, and then you do not even try actively to find the thing. All that you do is to concentrate in such a way as to see only the problem — but seeing not only its surface, seeing it in its depth, what it conceals. If you are able to gather together all your mental energies, bringing them to a point which is fixed on the enunciation of the problem, and you stay there, fixed, as though you were about to drill a hole in the wall, all of a sudden it will come. And this is the only way. If you try: Is it this, is it that, is it this, is it that?... You will never find anything or else you will need hours. You must get your mental forces to a point with strength enough to pierce through the words and strike upon the thing that is behind. There is a thing to be found — find it.
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And it is always the days you are a little hazy that it becomes difficult. You are hazy: as though there is something you seem to catch and which escapes you.

Naturally, if it is materially impossible — you do not have to deal with monsters! I believe your teachers are reasonable enough and if you go to them and say, “Well, I could not do it, I had no time, I did what I could, I did not have the time”, they won’t scold you, I don’t think so. But here ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it is a kind of half-inertia of the mind which makes you think that you have too much work. If you observe yourself, you will find out that there is always something which pulls this way, something which pulls that way and then this kind of haziness as though you were living in cottonwool, in the clouds: nothing is clear.

The usefulness of work is nothing else but that: to crystallise this mental power. For, what you learn (unless you put it in practice by some work or deeper studies), half of what you learn, at least, will vanish, disappear with time. But it will leave behind one thing: the capacity of crystallising your thought, making something clear out of it, something precise, exact and organised. And that is the true usefulness of work: to organise your cerebral capacity. If you remain in your hazy movement in that kind of cloudy fluidity, you may labour for years, it will be quite useless to you; you will not come out of it more intelligent than when you entered it. But if you are able, even for half an hour, to concentrate your attention on things that seem to you of very little interest, like a rule of grammar, for example (the rules of grammar are some of the dry things I was speaking about, there are other things much more arid, but indeed the rules of grammar are sufficiently arid), if you take one of them and try to understand it — not learn it by heart and apply mechanically what you have learnt by heart, that will be of no use — but try to understand the thought behind the words: “Why was this rule formulated in this way?” and try to find out your own formula for the thing; that is so interesting. “Why has this gentleman
who wrote this rule written it in this way? But I am studying, trying to understand why. Why has he put this word after that and that word after that other, and why has he stated the rule in this way? It is because he thought that it was the most complete and the most clear way of expressing the thing.” And so that’s the thing you must find. And when you find it, you suddenly exclaim: “That is what it means! It must be seen in this way, then it becomes very clear.”

I am going to explain it to you: when you have understood, it forms a little crystal in you, like a little shining point. And when you have put in many, many, many of these, then you will begin to be intelligent. That is the utility of work, not simply to stuff the head with a heap of things that take you nowhere.

How is it that in people occupied with scientific studies artistic imagination is lacking? Are these two things opposed to each other?

Not necessarily.

In general?

They do not belong to the same domain. It is exactly as though you had what is called “a torchlight”, a small beacon-light in your head at the place of observation. Scientists who want to do a certain work turn the beacon in a particular way, they always put it there and the beacon remains thus: they turn it towards matter, towards the details of matter. But people with imagination turn it upward, because up above there is everything, you know, all inspirations of artistic and literary things: this comes from another domain. It comes from a much more subtle domain, much less material. So these turn upward and want to receive the light from above. But it is the same instrument. The others turn it downwards, and it is just a lack of gymnastic skill. It is the same instrument. It is the same power of a luminous ray
upon something. But as one has made it a habit of concentrating it in a certain direction, one is no longer supple, one loses the habit of doing things otherwise.

But you can at any time do both the things. When you are doing science, you turn it in one direction and when you do literature and art, you turn it in the other direction; but it is the same instrument: all depends on the orientation. If you have concentration, you can move this power of concentration from one place to another and in every way it will be effective. If you are occupied with science, you use it in a scientific way, and if you want to do art, you use it in an artistic way. But it is the same instrument and it is the same power of concentration. It is simply because people do not know this that they limit themselves. So the hinges get rusty, they do not turn any more. Otherwise, if one keeps the habit of turning them, they continue to turn. Moreover, even from the ordinary point of view, it is not rare to find a scientist having as his hobby some artistic occupation — and the reverse also. It is because they have found that the one was not harmful to the other and that it was the same faculty which could be utilised in both.

Essentially, from the general point of view, particularly from the intellectual viewpoint, the most important thing is the capacity of attention and concentration, it is that which one must work at and develop. From the point of view of action (physical action), it is the will: you must work and build up an unshakable will. From the intellectual point of view, you must work and build up a power of concentration which nothing can shake. And if you have both, concentration and will, you will be a genius and nothing will resist you.