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This talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo’s *Elements of Yoga*, Chapter 13, “Sex—Food—Sleep”.

“Q: Is taking very little food helpful in controlling the senses?
“A: No, it simply exasperates them — to take a moderate amount is best. People who fast easily get exalted and may lose their balance.
“Q: If one takes only vegetarian food, does it help in controlling the senses?
“A: It avoids some of the difficulties which the meat-eaters have, but it is not sufficient by itself.”

Any questions?

What happens if one eats meat?

Do you want me to tell you a story? I knew a lady, a young Swedish woman, who was doing sadhana; and she was by habit a vegetarian, from both choice and habit. One day she was invited by some friends who gave her chicken for dinner. She did not want to make a fuss, she ate the chicken. But afterwards, during the night suddenly she found herself in a basket with her head between two pieces of wicker-work, shaken, shaken, shaken, and feeling wretched, miserable; and then, after that she found herself head down, feet in the air, and being shaken, shaken, shaken. (Laughter) She felt perfectly miserable; and then all of a sudden, somebody began pulling out things from her body, and that hurt her terribly, and then someone came along with a knife and chopped off her head; and then she woke up. She told me all this; she said she had never had such a frightful nightmare, that
she had not thought of anything before going to sleep, that it was just the consciousness of the poor chicken that had entered her, and that she had experienced in her dream all the anguish the poor chicken had suffered when it was carried to the market, sold, its feathers plucked and its neck cut! (Laughter)

That’s what happens! That is to say, in a greater or lesser proportion you swallow along with the meat a little of the consciousness of the animal you eat. It is not very serious, but it is not always very pleasant. And obviously it does not help you in being on the side of man rather than of the beast! It is evident that primitive men, those who were still much closer to the beast than to the spirit, apparently used to eat raw meat, and that gives much more strength than cooked meat. They killed the animal, tore it apart and bit into it, and they were very strong. And moreover, this is why there was in their intestines that little piece, the appendix which in those days was much bigger and served to digest the raw meat. And then man began to cook. He found out that things tasted better that way, and he ate cooked meat and gradually the appendix grew smaller and was no longer of any use at all. So now it is an encumbrance which at times brings on an illness.

This is to tell you that perhaps now it is time to change one’s food and go over to something a little less bestial! It depends absolutely on each one’s state of consciousness. For an ordinary man, living an ordinary life, having ordinary activities, not thinking at all of anything else except earning his living, of keeping himself fit and perhaps taking care of his family, it is good to eat meat, it is all right for him to eat anything at all, whatever agrees with him, whatever does him good.

But if one wishes to pass from this ordinary life to a higher one, the problem begins to become interesting; and if, after having come to a higher life, one tries to prepare oneself for the transformation, then it becomes very important. For there certainly are foods which help the body to become subtle and others which keep it in a state of animality. But it is only at that
particular time that this becomes very important, not before; and before reaching that moment, there are many other things to do. Certainly it is better to purify one’s mind and purify one’s vital before thinking of purifying one’s body. For even if you take all possible precautions and live physically taking care not to absorb anything except what will help to subtilise your body, if your mind and vital remain in a state of desire, inconscience, darkness, passion and so on, that won’t be of any use at all. Only, your body will become weak, dislocated from the inner life and one fine day it will fall ill.

One must begin from inside, I have already told you this once. One must begin from above, first purify the higher and then purify the lower. I am not saying that one must indulge in all sorts of degrading things in the body. That’s not what I am telling you. Don’t take it as an advice not to exercise control over your desires! It isn’t that at all. But what I mean is, do not try to be an angel in the body if you are not already just a little of an angel in your mind and vital; for that would dislocate you in a different way from the usual one, but not one that is better. We said the other day that what is most important is to keep the equilibrium. Well, to keep the equilibrium everything must progress at the same time. You must not leave one part of your being in darkness and try to bring the other into light. You must take great care not to leave any corner dark. There you are.

*Why were eggs forbidden in the Ashram formerly? Now you give eggs.*

Eggs were forbidden?

*I don’t know. That’s what we were told.*

Ah, people say many things, but I am not responsible for all the things they say! *(Laughter)* I don’t remember ever refusing
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an egg to someone who needed it from the point of view of health. But if people come and ask for something just out of greediness, for pleasure, I always refuse, as much now as before. It is only from the point of view of health, you know, of the physical equilibrium, that certain things are allowed. Everything is allowed. I haven’t refused meat to one who needed it. There were people who ate it because they needed it. But if someone comes asking me for something just in order to satisfy a desire, I say “No”, whatever it may be, even ice-cream! (Laughter)

*When one eats an egg, doesn’t one eat the chicken inside it?*

It’s not yet formed, the consciousness of the chicken. Of course, one must take care to eat the egg fresh before the chick begins to be formed.

*Sweet Mother, if the agony of a chicken can attack us, so too can that of a beetroot or a carrot, can’t it?*

For all that, I believe the chicken is more conscious than the beetroot. (Laughter) But I ought to tell you my own experience. Only I was thinking this was not something common.

In Tokyo I had a garden and in this garden I was growing vegetables myself. I had a fairly big garden and many vegetables. And so, every morning I used to go for a walk, after having watered them and all the rest; I used to walk around to choose which vegetables I could take for eating. Well, just imagine! There were some which said to me, “No, no, no, no, no.”... And then there were others which called, and I saw them from a distance, and they were saying, “Take me, take me, take me!” So it was very simple, I looked for those which wanted to be taken and never did I touch those which did not. I used to think it was something exceptional. I loved my plants very much, I used to look after them, I had put a lot of consciousness into
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them while watering them, cleaning them, so I thought they had a special capacity, perhaps.
But in France it was the same thing. I had a garden also in the south of France where I used to grow peas, radishes, carrots. Well, there were some which were happy, which asked to be taken and eaten, and there were those which said, “No, no, no, don’t touch me, don’t touch me!” (Laughter)

Why did they say that, Sweet Mother?

Well, I experimented precisely to find out; and the result was not always the same. At times it was indeed that the plant was not edible; it was not good, it was hard or bitter, it was not good for eating. At other times it happened that it was not ready, that it was too early; it wasn’t ripe. By waiting for a day or two, a day or two later it said to me, “Take me, take me, take me!” (Laughter)

In the past, sages used to torture their bodies in order to realise the Divine!

Well then, they were not sages! (Laughter) This leads to nothing at all, except to pride, a spiritual pride, that’s all. But surely not to the realisation of the Divine.

But it is said that they did the highest form of sadhana and realised what they wanted.

It is said, many things are said.

Aren’t dogs more faithful than men?

Certainly! Because it is their nature to be faithful, and they have no mental complications. What prevents men from being faithful are their mental complications. Most men are not
faithful because they fear being duped. You don’t know what it is to be duped? They fear being deceived, being exploited. They fear... Behind their faithfulness there is still a very big egoism which is more or less hidden, and there is always that bargaining, more or less conscious, of give-and-take: one gives oneself to someone but whether one tells oneself this or not, one expects something in exchange. You are faithful, but also want others to be faithful to you, that is, look after you, to be quite sweet to you, and, especially not to try to profit by your faithfulness. None of these complications are there in the dog, for its mind is very rudimentary. It does not have this marvellous capacity of reasoning that men have, a capacity which has made them commit so many stupidities.

Only one cannot turn and go back. One cannot become a dog again. So one must become a higher man and have the quality of the dog on a higher plane; that is, instead of its being a half-conscious fidelity, and in any case very instinctive, a sort of need that ties it down, it must be a willed, conscious fidelity, and especially above all egoism. There is a point where all the virtues are united: it is a point that goes beyond the ego. If we take this faithfulness, if we take devotion, take love, the meaning of service, all these things, when they are above the egoistic level, they meet, in the sense that they give themselves and do not expect anything in exchange. And if you climb one step higher, instead of its being done with the idea of duty and abnegation, it is done with an intense joy which carries within itself its own reward, which needs nothing in exchange, for it carries its joy in itself. But then, for that you must have climbed quite high and must no longer have that turning back upon yourself which, of all things, pulls you down lowest. That kind of... that sympathy, full of self-pity, wherein one cajoles and caresses oneself and says, “Poor me!”, that, indeed, is something terrible, and one does this so constantly, without being aware of it. This turning back upon oneself, a kind of degrading self-compassion, in which one tells oneself in a tone so full of pity, “Nobody understands me! No
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one loves me! No one cares for me as people should!” etc., and
one goes on and on.... And now this is really terrible, it draws
you down into a hole immediately.

One must have gone far beyond all that, left it very far
behind oneself, in order to truly have the joy of faithfulness,
the joy of self-giving, which does not care at all, no, indeed,
not at all, in any way, whether it is properly received or gets the
adequate response. Not to expect anything in exchange for what
one does, not to expect anything, not through asceticism or a
sense of sacrifice but because one has the joy of the consciousness
one is in and that is enough; this is much better than all one can
receive, from whomsoever it be; but that again is something else.
There are quite a few stages between the two.

Mother, you said that the sleep before midnight gives us
most rest...

Physically, yes.

Why?

Ah! I said that through personal experience and then that...
There’s no why about it, is there? Everyone should find this out
for himself, or not find it out. But I have heard from those who
are interested in earth-chemistry that there are certain rays —
(turning to Pavitra) isn’t that so? Tell us, do you know about it?
— sun-rays which remain active in the atmosphere till midnight,
and other rays which become active afterwards, and these give
you strength and those draw it out of you. But there are many
things like that; at least this, you understand, is something we
hear of or read in books. I am giving it to you for what it
is worth, I know nothing. Somebody who is very well up in
the subject could give you a fuller explanation. (Laughing) But
certain things are true, in practice. I cannot say why; perhaps
they are only personal things! But still, I have heard of a similar
experience from others also. For instance, you go into the sea, remain there a few minutes and you come out full of strength. You go into the sea and remain in it for an hour and you come out completely exhausted! Even with a hot bath it is the same thing. You have a hot bath; you are very tired; you get into it; you remain there at the most for a moment; you come out and feel quite fresh. You remain there for a quarter of an hour, you come out, you have lost all your strength, your energy, there's nothing left, you are drained out.

I tell you this, I cannot speak to you with any competence about the reason, but the fact is there. It is like that. For myself I have an explanation, but it is good only for me, it does not work for others. So it is useless.

As for these stages of sleep which are spoken about here, if one is conscious of one's nights, one can cover them in a few minutes. One does not need to wait for hours of sleep to do this, you understand; if one is conscious, one can pass through all that in a few minutes. To begin with, when one is conscious of one's nights, the first thing to do before falling fast asleep, just in the state when one begins to relax, relax all one's nerves — I have explained this to you already, one relaxes all the nerves and lets oneself go... like this... you know — well, at that moment, one must relax very carefully all mental activity and make that quiet, as quiet as possible, and not go off to sleep until the mind is quite calm. Then you escape quite a long period of useless excitement which is extremely tiring. If you can so manage that the mind relaxes and enters into a complete peace first, your sleep will immediately become very peaceful and very refreshing; naturally, your vital must not be in a turmoil, for then, in that case, it will take you into all sorts of places and make you commit all kinds of stupidities, and the result will be that you will wake up even more tired than when you went to sleep.

But if you are conscious, after having calmed your vital, when you begin to come out from your physical consciousness and enter a more subtle consciousness, you put your vital to
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sleep, you say to it, “Rest now, keep very quiet”, and then you enter your mental activity and say to the mind, “Rest now, remain very quiet”, and you put it to sleep also; and then you come out of the mind into a higher region, and there, if it begins to interest you, for instance, if it is the first time you have gone there, you may look at what is happening, have your experience, learn things — at times one learns very interesting things; and then, sometimes one can become aware of a certain general state also, have ideas about other people, other things; it is interesting! And later, if you have had enough of this, you say, “Keep quiet, sleep, don’t move”, and you put that to sleep, and rise to a still higher consciousness, and so on, till you reach a state where you are on the borders of form, I am not speaking of physical form — on the borders of all form, much higher than the form of thought, naturally; on the borders of all form and all vibration, in the perfect silence, what here we call Sachchidananda. And when you are there, everything stops, all vibrations subside, and if you remain there just three minutes, you come back to your body absolutely rested, refreshed, fortified, as though you had slept for hours! This is something one can learn to do. I don’t say it can be done overnight, a little work is necessary and also some persistence, but still... this one must learn to do; and when you are very anxious, very tired, very... for instance, when you have just undergone violent attacks from hostile forces in one form or another and are very tired, if you follow this process consciously, well, within a few minutes all that disappears completely. It is something worth learning. Only, one must be very, very, very persevering, for... Wait a bit, I am going to tell you something more about it.

When I began studying occultism, I became aware that — just when I began to work upon my nights in order to make them conscious — I became aware that there was between the subtle-physical and the most material vital a small region, very small, which was not sufficiently developed to serve as a conscious link between the two activities. So what took place in the
consciousness of the most material vital did not get translated exactly in the consciousness of the most subtle physical. Some of it got lost on the way because it was like a — not positively a void but something only half-conscious, not sufficiently developed. I knew there was only one way, that was to work to develop it. I began working. This happened sometime about the month of February, I believe. One month, two months, three, four; no result. We go on. Five months, six months... it was at the end of July or the beginning of August. I left Paris, the house I was staying in, and went to the countryside, quite a small place on the seashore, to stay with some friends who had a garden. Now, in that garden there was a lawn — you know what a lawn is, don’t you? grass — where there were flowers and around it some trees. It was a fine place, very quiet, very silent. I lay on the grass, like this, flat on my stomach, my elbows in the grass, and then suddenly all the life of that Nature, all the life of that region between the subtle-physical and the most material vital, which is very living in plants and in Nature, all that region became all at once, suddenly, without any transition, absolutely living, intense, conscious, marvellous; and this was the result, wasn’t it?, of six months of work which had given nothing. I had not noticed anything; but just a little shift like that and the result was there! It is like the chick in the egg, yes! It is there for a very long time and yet one sees nothing at all. And one wonders whether there is indeed a chick in the egg; and then, suddenly “Tick!”, there is a tiny hole, you know, and then everything bursts and out comes the chick! It is quite ready, but it took all that time to be formed; that’s how it is. When you want to prepare something within you, that is how it is, it is like the chick in the egg. You need a very long time, and this without having the least result, never getting discouraged, and continuing your effort, absolutely regularly, as though you had eternity before you and, moreover, as though you were quite disinterested about the result. You do the work because you do it. And then, suddenly, one day, it bursts and you see before you the full result of your work.
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But you understand, don’t you? One speaks like this, very easily, of becoming conscious of one’s nights, having control over one’s sleep-activities and all sorts of things of this kind, but you need to do many such little works like the one I have just described to you. Many of these are needed to obtain this result. When one is accomplished, you realise that there is another missing, and when this is done, you realise there is still another, and so on, until one fine day you can do what I said, and you go from one plane to another, like that, putting all to rest, until you come out of all activity and enter the supreme rest, consciously. It is worth the trouble.

There you are!
Another question? No?
Finished.