3 February 1954

This talk is based upon Mother's essay “Vital Education”.

“In some ancient initiations it was stated that the number of senses that man can develop is not five but seven and in certain special cases even twelve. Certain races at certain times have, out of necessity, developed more or less perfectly one or another of these supplementary senses. With a proper discipline persistently followed, they are within the reach of all who are sincerely interested in this development and it results. Among the faculties that are often mentioned, there is, for example, the ability to widen the physical consciousness, project it out of oneself so as to concentrate it on a given point and thus obtain sight, hearing, smell, taste and even touch at a distance.”

What are the names of these twelve senses?

The names? In the Chaldean tradition they were in Chaldaic. In other traditions, in other languages; in Egypt they were written in hieroglyphs. Each system gave its names. I had a list of the names — not only of the names but also of what they represented, what kind of sense each represented — but it was a very long time ago, I don’t remember them any longer. As I have said there, it is in the field of things seen, felt, done at a distance by a concentrated projection of consciousness. For instance, one is in a room and, due to an illness or an accident, one cannot move. Next to this room there is another; next to that there is a sort of bridge; after the bridge there are steps going down; and these steps go down to a big studio in the middle of a garden. Now, the person laid up in the room wishes to know what is
going on in the studio. He concentrates his consciousness and then extends it, so to say (truly it is as though he extended it almost materially), and he goes along the whole way and reaches the studio. If he does this properly, he sees what there is in the studio, can hear what is going on, though he is not there himself: the body is lying in a bed in a room, but the consciousness is projected. It is a physical consciousness. It is not an inner state, for one sees physically, hears physically. If there are people in the room one sees them, and if they are speaking one hears them speaking. Naturally, it is not from the very first day that one succeeds; it asks for a very rigorous discipline. It corresponds a little (a little) to that capacity which was developed in the Red Indians due to the conditions of their life. I don’t know how it is at present, but formerly they used to put their ear to the earth, and they had so fine an ear that they could hear steps more than a mile away. They heard the steps of those who were walking at a distance of more than two or three kilometres simply by putting their ear to the ground. Or take the dog which, if given something to smell, finds the trail of that scent again, can follow it with its nose. Well, it is one kind of super-sense, that is, a sense that has reached such a degree of intensity and refinement that it can indeed feel what the ordinary sense does not feel, can see at a distance, really see, see physically at a distance, through walls. It is said that the blind develop a sense which enables them to feel an object at a distance. They do not see, they walk in darkness as in a black night; but they have a kind of sense of touch at a distance, a material contact due to which, long before touching the object, they know; for example, if there is a piece of furniture in their way, long before knocking against it, they feel it from a distance.

In children the mind is not developed when they are small. Is this also true of the vital?

No, the vital is much more developed than the mind. You know,
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I have said there that things are crystallised, that is they take a form, and a more and more precise, a more and more fixed form (the more precise the form, the more fixed it is). In children it is much more like water; it is not yet in a very concrete and precise form. That is why, moreover, one can have a great influence upon them, for it is still supple, it is not crystallised; one can notice it: it has something malleable about it, as though one were moulding butter; however, as soon as they are about twenty or twenty-five, the special disposition, the turn of character is fixed and, at that moment, instead of preventing defects, it becomes necessary to mend them. That is another thing. If one wants to give an education which prevents bad habits from being formed or bad tendencies from being pursued, an education which leads children constantly into the right path (that one wants them to follow), well, when they are small it is possible, when they become bigger, it becomes hard. One cannot change the imprint easily. Even sometimes it is necessary to break things to be able to change them: as those who are not progressive, who are fixed and remain fixed, who cling with all their strength to their petty habits. While the little ones are supple, one can change their opinions, one can make them progress, give them the sense that tomorrow one must do better than today.

Are bad habits, as for instance that of not keeping things in order, due to the vital?

That depends. For example, children who have no order, who can’t keep their things carefully but lose or spoil them — there

1 “In certain cases this education will encourage the movements that express the light, in others, on the contrary, those that express the shadow. If the circumstances and the environment are favourable, the light will grow at the expense of the shadow; otherwise the opposite will happen. And in this way the individual’s character will crystallise according to the whims of Nature and the determinisms of material and vital life, unless a higher element comes in in time, a conscious will which, refusing to allow Nature to follow her whimsical ways, will replace them by a logical and clear-sighted discipline. This conscious will is what we mean by a rational method of education.”
are three reasons for this. Most often it is a child who lacks vitality. When it is like that, when it can’t keep its things carefully and all is in disorder around it, this is always a sign of a lack of vitality; it does not have sufficient vitality to take interest in these outer things. The second reason is that it lacks interest in material life, the life of things, and that it has no discipline, doesn’t discipline itself. For instance, children when they undress throw their clothes all over the place; or else, when they have finished playing, they leave their toys lying about; when they have written out their homework, everything is littered all around: the fountain-pen on one side, the notebook on another, the reader on a third, and then all these get lost. Unfortunately that’s how it is with the great majority of the children here at the school, they lose everything. I have found books reduced to pulp because they had spent the whole night on a flower-pot and it had rained the next morning! When they were found, they were like gruel. But that is rare. Pencils too — I have a collection of fountain-pens and pencils picked up thus, having been lost. These are absolutely undisciplined natures, those who have no method — and within themselves they don’t have any method either. And moreover they despise things — so, as Sri Aurobindo says, they are not worthy of having them. People who don’t know how to deal with things carefully, don’t deserve to have them. Sri Aurobindo has often written on this subject in his letters. He has said that if you don’t know how to take care of material things, you have no right to have them. Indeed this shows a kind of selfishness and confusion in the human being, and it is not a good sign. And then later when they grow up, some of them cannot keep a cupboard in order or a drawer in order. They may be in a room which looks very tidy and very neat outwardly, and then you open a drawer or a cupboard, it is like a battlefield! Everything is pell-mell. You find everything in a jumble; nothing is arranged. These are people with a poor little head in which ideas lie in the same state as their material objects. They have not organised their ideas. They haven’t put
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them in order. They live in a cerebral confusion. And that is a sure sign, I have never met an exception to this rule: people who don’t know how to keep their things in order — their ideas are in disorder in their heads, always. They exist together, the most contradictory ideas are put together, and not through a higher synthesis, don’t you believe it: simply because of a disorder and an incapacity to organise their ideas. You don’t need to speak even for ten minutes with people if you can manage to enter their room and open the drawers of their tables and look into their cupboard. You know in what state they are, don’t you?

On the other hand, there was someone (I shall tell you who afterwards) who had in his room hundreds of books, countless sheets of paper, notebooks and all sorts of things, and so you entered the room and saw books and papers everywhere — a whole pile, it was quite full. But if you made the mistake to shift a single little bit of paper from its place, he knew it immediately and asked you, “Who has touched my things?” You, when you come in, see so many things that you feel quite lost. And yet each thing had its place. And it was so consciously done, I tell you, that if one paper was displaced — for instance, a paper with notes on it or a letter or something else which was taken away from one place and placed in another with the idea of putting things in order — he used to say, “You have touched my things; you have displaced them and put my things in disorder.” That of course was Sri Aurobindo! That means you must not confuse order with poverty. Naturally if you have about a dozen books and a very limited number of things, it is easier to keep them in order, but what one must succeed in doing is to put into order — and a logical, conscious, intelligent order — a countless number of things. That asks for a capacity of organisation.

Of course, if someone is very ill, has no strength to spare, then that’s different. And yet even here, there are limits. I knew ill people who could tell you, “Open this drawer and in the left corner at the back you will find such and such a thing under such another”; the man could not move and take it himself, but
he knew very well where it was. But apart from that, the ideal is to have some organisation, as for instance of the kind found in libraries where there are hundreds of thousands of books and where everything is classified (naturally it is not done by just one man), but it is a work in which each thing is so well classified that even if you bring a card and say “I want this book”, a quarter of an hour later you have it or sometimes in five minutes. That is organisation. And yet there are rooms full of books there. But all this is the result of work perfected by a large number of men, the result of a professional organisation. Well, for oneself, one must organise one’s own things — and at the same time one’s own ideas — in the same way, and must know exactly where things are and be able to go straight to them, because one’s organisation is logical. It is your own logic — it may not be your neighbour’s logic, not necessarily, it is your own logic — but your organisation being logical, you know exactly where a thing is and, as I told you, if that thing is displaced, you know it immediately. And those who can do that are generally those who can put their ideas into order and can also organise their character and can finally control their movements. And then, if you make progress, you succeed in governing your physical life; you begin to have a control over your physical movements. If you take life in that way, truly it becomes interesting. If one lives in a confusion, a disorder, an inner and outer chaos in which everything is mixed up and one is conscious of nothing and still less is master of things, this is not living. This is not living, it is being in a sea of inconscience, being tossed about by the waves, caught by the currents, thrown against rocks, seized again by another wave and thrown against another rock; and one goes on thus with bruises and blows and bumps. And then, should one ask you, “Why is it like this?” — “I don’t know.” — “Why did you do that?” — “I don’t know.” — “Why do you think in this way?” — “I don’t know.” — “Why did you make that movement?” — “I don’t know.” All the answers are “I don’t know”.

Essentially there is but one single true reason for living: it is
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to know oneself. We are here to learn — to learn what we are, why we are here, and what we have to do. And if we don’t know that, our life is altogether empty — for ourselves and for others.

And so, generally, it is better to begin early, for there is much to learn. If one wants to learn about life as it is, the world as it is, and then really know the why and the how of life, one can begin when very young, from the time one is very, very tiny — before the age of five. And then, when one is a hundred, one will still be able to learn. So it is interesting. And all the time one can have surprises, always learn something one didn’t know, meet with an experience one did not have before, find something one was ignorant of. It is surely very interesting. And the more one knows, the more aware does one become that one has everything to learn. Truly, I could say that only fools believe they know. That indeed is a sure sign, someone coming and telling you, “Oh! I know all that; oh! I know all that”; he is immediately sized up!

You have said: “Everyone possesses... two opposite tendencies of character,... which are like the light and the shadow of the same thing.”

Why are things made in this way? Can’t one have only the light?

Yes, if one eliminates the shadow. But it must be eliminated. That does not happen by itself. The world as it is is a mixed

2 “...Everyone possesses in a large measure, and the exceptional individual in an increasing degree of precision, two opposite tendencies of character, in almost equal proportions, which are like the light and the shadow of the same thing. Thus someone who has the capacity of being exceptionally generous will suddenly find an obstinate avarice rising up in his nature, the courageous man will be a coward in some part of his being and the good man will suddenly have wicked impulses. In this way life seems to endow everyone not only with the possibility of expressing an ideal, but also with contrary elements representing in a concrete manner the battle he has to wage and the victory he has to win for the realisation to become possible. Consequently, all life is an education pursued more or less consciously, more or less willingly.”
world. You cannot have an object which gets the light from one side without its casting a shadow on the other. It is like that, and indeed it is the shadows which make you see the lights. The world is like that, and to have only the light one must definitely go through the entire discipline necessary for eliminating the shadow. This is what I have explained a little farther; I have said that this shadow was like a sign of what you had to conquer in your nature in order to be able to realise what you have come to do. If you have a part to play, a mission to fulfil, you will always carry in yourself the main difficulty preventing you from realising it, so that you have within your reach the victory you must win. If you had to fight against a difficulty which is everywhere on earth, it would be very difficult (you would need to have a very vast consciousness and a very great power), while if you carry in your own nature just the shadow or defect you must conquer, well, it is there, within your reach: you see all the time the effects of this thing and can fight it directly, immediately. It is a very practical organisation.

You haven’t seen in the Bulletin that letter of Sri Aurobindo’s: the “Evil Persona”? It is in the Bulletin. The thing is very well explained there.³

³ The “Evil Persona”

“What you say about the “Evil Persona” interests me greatly as it answers to my consistent experience that a person greatly endowed for the work has, always or almost always,—perhaps one ought not to make a too rigid universal rule about these things—a being attached to him, sometimes appearing like a part of him, which is just the contradiction of the thing he centrally represents in the work to be done. Or, if it is not there at first, not bound to his personality, a force of this kind enters into his environment as soon as he begins his movement to realise. Its business seems to be to oppose, to create stumblings and wrong conditions, in a word, to set before him the whole problem of the work he has started to do. It would seem as if the problem could not, in the occult economy of things, be solved otherwise than by the predestined instrument making the difficulty his own. That would explain many things that seem very disconcerting on the surface.”

Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1660