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Once or twice, as a game, you took one of your books or Sri Aurobindo’s and opened a page at random, and read out a sentence. Can these sentences give one a sign or an indication? What should we do to get a true answer?

Everybody can do it. It is done in this way: you concentrate. Now, it depends on what you want. If you have an inner problem and want the solution, you concentrate on this problem; if you want to know the condition you are in, which you are not aware of—if you want to get some light on the state you are in, you just come forward with simplicity and ask for the light. Or else, quite simply, if you are curious to know what the invisible knowledge has to tell you, you remain silent and still for a moment and then open the book. I always used to recommend taking a paper-knife, because it is thinner; while you are concentrated you insert it in the book and with the tip indicate something. Then, if you know how to concentrate, that is to say, if you really do it with an aspiration to have an answer, it always comes.

For, in books of this kind (Mother shows “The Synthesis of Yoga”), books of revelation, there is always an accumulation of forces—at least of higher mental forces, and most often of spiritual forces of the highest knowledge. Every book, on account of the words it contains, is like a small accumulator of these forces. People don’t know this, for they don’t know how to make use of it, but it is so. In the same way, in every picture, photograph, there is an accumulation, a small accumulation representative of the force of the person whose picture it is, of his nature and, if he has powers, of his powers. Now, you, when you are sincere and have an aspiration, you emanate a certain vibration, the vibration of your aspiration which goes
and meets the corresponding force in the book, and it is a higher consciousness which gives you the answer.

Everything is contained potentially. Each element of a whole potentially contains what is in the whole. It is a little difficult to explain, but you will understand with an example: when people want to practise magic, if they have a bit of nail or hair, it is enough for them, because within this, potentially, there is all that is in the being itself. And in a book there is potentially — not expressed, not manifest — the knowledge which is in the person who wrote the book. Thus, Sri Aurobindo represented a totality of comprehension and knowledge and power; and every one of his books is at once a symbol and a representation. Every one of his books contains symbolically, potentially, what is in him. Therefore, if you concentrate on the book, you can, through the book, go back to the source. And even, by passing through the book, you will be able to receive much more than what is just in the book.

There is always a way of reading and understanding what one reads, which gives an answer to what you want. It is not just a chance or an amusement, nor is it a kind of diversion. You may do it just “like that”, and then nothing at all happens to you, you have no reply and it is not interesting. But if you do it seriously, if seriously your aspiration tries to concentrate on this instrument — it is like a battery, isn’t it, which contains energies — if it tries to come into contact with the energy which is there and insists on having the answer to what it wants to know, well, naturally, the energy which is there — the union of the two forces, the force given out by you and that accumulated in the book — will guide your hand and your paper-knife or whatever you have; it will guide you exactly to the thing that expresses what you ought to know.... Obviously, if one does it without sincerity or conviction, nothing at all happens. If it is done sincerely, one gets an answer.

Certain books are like this, more powerfully charged than others; there are others where the result is less clear. But
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generally, books containing aphorisms and short sentences — not very long philosophical explanations, but rather things in a condensed and precise form — it is with these that one succeeds best.

Naturally, the value of the answer depends on the value of the spiritual force contained in the book. If you take a novel, it will tell you nothing at all but stupidities. But if you take a book containing a condensation of forces — of knowledge or spiritual force or teaching power — you will receive your answer.

So now, what do you want to know? I have explained the mechanism to you; you want me to do it? Is that what you wanted, or did you only want to know how it is done?

No, Mother, before the class, as we had no questions I opened many books and tried to find something in this way, but I couldn’t find anything.

You didn’t find anything, because probably at that time there was no curiosity in your mind!

There are many explanations in this book [The Synthesis of Yoga], so if you tumble into the midst of an explanation... It should be rather a book like Thoughts and Glimpses, or Prayers and Meditations, or Words of the Mother; also Questions and Answers.

We tried the Letters of Sri Aurobindo, Mother, the third series.

The Letters?... Give me the book. Isn’t this the one about literature?

Yes, Mother.

Then it’s the worst of them all! (Laughter)
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No, it is the second series.

Then I am going to draw first for the collectivity. That is, what will answer and express the collective state of all those who are gathered here. We are going to see what it will do. (Mother concentrates and inserts a small card in the book.)

My child, this is in English! I must translate it off-hand.

My card was on this, which indeed seems to me quite a general problem for everybody here: the true attitude in work. (Laughter) Sri Aurobindo says this, that the true attitude in work comes “when the work is always associated with the thought of the Mother, done as an offering to her, with the call to do it through you.” This is the sentence I have found, I think that’s not bad for a beginning!

Now, does anyone want me to draw for him?

I.

You! And what do you want? Do you want to know the state you are in, or what?

The state I ought to be in.

(Mother concentrates for a moment, opens the book and reads silently.) This is the problem you are interested in: the purpose of the Avatar:

“I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness....”

This is where I put my paper-knife. He adds this:

“If nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is also that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha also, is all wrong or the whole life
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“and action of the Avatar is quite futile.”
Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 408

I don’t know if this is a problem which you have been thinking about, but anyway this is what has come in reply.... It was obviously for someone who had asked him: “The Avatar comes and opens the Way, but if there is nobody to follow him, what happens?” Sri Aurobindo says: either his conception is wrong or his life is quite futile. That is to say, if a divine Power comes on earth to open the Way to a higher realisation and it so happens that there is nobody on earth to follow the path, it is quite obvious that it was useless for him to come. But as a matter of fact, I don’t think it has ever happened.

Let me see the end of the sentence.... Yes, it is in reply to someone who said:

“There is no way and no possibility of following it”, and “that all the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug” —

That well-known English word! This person declared that there was

“no possibility of struggle or effort for one who represents the Divine.”

That is to say, the denial of the life of all those mentioned here. And Sri Aurobindo adds that

“Such a conception makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood;” and “there is then no reason in it, no necessity in it, no meaning in it.”

He adds (Mother laughs):
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“The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth.”

He can do it just like this (gesture), he is all-powerful, he has only to pull them up and then they will be lifted up. Why should he come and take all this trouble here?

And Sri Aurobindo says in conclusion:

“It is only if it is a part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that the Avatar has any meaning.”

Letters on Yoga, pp. 408–09

There he touches on a problem you were concerned about, no? You have never asked yourself this question: what was the purpose of a divine incarnation in a human body, whether it was necessary or not, and how it happened and why it happened? This question has never interested you? No?

Not in this way.

Not in this way. Then it was in reply to something you were not conscious of. I know what it was an answer to, but you were not conscious.

Ah! does anyone else want anything? Nobody?... Oh! how shy you all are.

Me.

Ah! what are we going to find for you? (Mother opens the Letters....) These are answers to people who want scholarly knowledge. You want to know in Indian terminology what the transcendental Mother is?... People always ask scholarly questions — there is no life in them, it goes on only in the head.

Wait, I am going to try with this (Mother takes The Synthesis of Yoga), we’ll see if by any chance we can find something.
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(Mother concentrates and opens the book.) Ah! this answers very well:

“The most disconcerting discovery is to find that every part of us — intellect, will, sense-mind, nervous or desire self, the heart, the body — has each, as it were, its own complex individuality and natural formation independent of the rest;...”

This is the very thing for you! (Laughter)

It continues, he explains:

“...it neither agrees with itself nor with the others nor with the representative ego which is the shadow cast by some central and centralising self on our superficial ignorance.”

Why! this is really very fine. (Mother reads again:) “The representative ego which is the shadow cast by some central and centralising self on our superficial ignorance.” And then:

“We find that we are composed not of one but many personalities and each has its own demands and differing nature. Our being is a roughly constituted chaos into which we have to introduce the principle of a divine order.”

Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 69

This is indeed very fine.

(Another disciple) I had prepared a question. (He takes the Synthesis and reads:) “The central Consciousness in its turn will take up more and more the outer mental activities of knowledge and turn them into a parcel of itself or an annexed province; it will infuse into them its more authentic movement and make a more and more
spiritualised and illumined mind its instrument in these surface fields, its new conquests.... There will be less and less individual choice, opinion, preference, less and less of intellectualisation, mental weaving, cerebral galley-slave labour; a Light within will see all that has to be seen, know all that has to be known, develop, create, organise....

“But this cannot be the whole scope of the transformation.... For, if it were so, knowledge would still remain a working of the mind, liberated, universalised, spiritualised....”

The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 137–38

So, what do you want to know?

That means that the spiritualised mind is of no value at all!

Sri Aurobindo says,

“If it were so, knowledge would still remain a working of the mind,” the mind “liberated, universalised, spiritualised, but still, as all mind must be, comparatively restricted, relative, imperfect in the very essence of its dynamism.”

I don’t understand.

Yes, it’s clear to me that you haven’t understood! He says it is not like that. That is not what happens, for if it were like that, it would be absurd.

He says later:

“The spiritualised mind will exceed itself and transmute into a supramental power of knowledge.”

Ibid., p. 138
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If the spiritualised mind continues to function like the ordinary mind, there would be no difference. But in fact that is just the opposite of what happens.

*But when it is spiritualised, how can it function as before?*

You must not read just one sentence and not read what goes ahead and what follows, because in this way one can prove anything at all.

*But here, with you, one doesn’t need to go through all these experiences, isn’t that so, Mother?*

Need to go through.... But he has said all along that everyone follows his own path, in his own way, and that no two paths are alike, and each one has his own road. So, what “need”, need for whom? For you? I don’t know. Go through what? Putting one’s ideas in some order? That is quite necessary for everybody perhaps.

I don’t know what you want to know!

*To reach the Supermind, Sri Aurobindo says there are stages: first, the mind, then the purified mind, the illumined mind and all that.... Is it necessary for everyone to go through all these stages?*

(After a silence) It is likely that a sequence of this kind always occurs. But the duration of the stages and their importance vary considerably according to individuals.... For some the passage may be rapid enough to be hardly perceptible, while for others it may take a very long time; and according to the nature of the resistance in each one, the stress on one or another of these stages varies enormously.
For some, it may be so rapid that it seems almost instantaneous, as though it didn't exist. For others, it may take years.

There is one phenomenon which obviously seems indispensable if one wants the realisation to become stable.... Experiences come, touch the consciousness, sometimes bring great illuminations, then get blurred, retreat into the background and, outwardly, in your ordinary consciousness, you don't feel that there is a great change, a great difference. And this phenomenon may occur very often, may repeat itself for many years. Suddenly you get a sort of revelation, like an illumination, you are in the true consciousness and have the feeling of having got hold of the real thing. And then, slowly or suddenly, it seems to recede behind you, and you seek but do not find that there is any great change in you.... These things seem to come as heralds or as promises: “See, it will happen”, or to tell you, “Well, have faith, it will be like that.”

And this may recur very often. There is progress, obviously, but it is very slow and hardly apparent.

But then, suddenly — perhaps because one is sufficiently prepared, perhaps simply because the time has come, and it has been so decreed — suddenly, when such an experience occurs, its result in the part of the being where it takes place is a complete reversal of consciousness. It is a very clear, very concrete phenomenon. The best way of describing it is this: a complete reversal. And then the relation of the consciousness with the other parts of the being and with the outer world is as if completely changed. Absolutely like an overturning. And that reversal no longer comes back to the same old place, the consciousness no longer returns to its former position — Sri Aurobindo would say “status”. Once this has happened in any part of the being, this part of the being is stabilised.

And until that happens, it comes and goes, comes and goes, one advances and then has the impression of marking time, and one advances again and then marks time again, and sometimes one feels as though one were going backwards, and it
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is interminable — and indeed it is interminable. It may last for years and years and years. But when this reversal of consciousness takes place, whether in the mind or a part of the mind, whether in the vital or a part of the vital, or even in the physical consciousness itself and in the body-consciousness, once this is established, it is over; you no longer go back, you do not ever return to what you were before. And this is the true indication that you have taken a step forward definitively. And before this, there are only preparations.

Those who have experienced this reversal know what I am speaking about; but if one hasn’t, one can’t understand. One may have a kind of idea by analogy, people who have tried to describe yoga compare it with the reversal of a prism: when you put it at a certain angle, the light is white; when you turn it over, it is broken up. Well, this is exactly what happens, that is to say, you restore the white. In the ordinary consciousness there is decomposition and you restore the white. However, this is only an image. It is not really that, this is an analogy. But the phenomenon is extremely concrete. It is almost as though you were to put what is inside out, and what is outside in. And it isn’t that either! But if you could turn a ball inside-out, or a balloon — you can’t, can you? — if you could put the inside out and the outside in, it would be something like what I mean.

And one can’t say that one “experiences” this reversal — there is no “feeling”, it is almost a mechanical fact — it is extraordinarily mechanical. (Mother takes an object from the table beside her and turns it upside down...) There would be some very interesting things to say about the difference between the moment of realisation, of siddhi — like this reversal of consciousness for example — and all the work of development, the tapasya; to say how it comes about.... For the sadhana, tapasya is one thing and the siddhi another, quite a different thing. You may do tapasya for centuries, and you will always go as at a tangent — closer and closer to the realisation, nearer and nearer, but it is only when the siddhi is given to you... then, everything is
changed, everything is reversed. And this is inexpressible, for as soon as it is put in words it escapes. But there is a difference — a real difference, essential, total — between aspiration, the mental tension, even the tension of the highest, most luminous mind and realisation: something which has been decided above from all time, and is absolutely independent of all personal effort, of all gradation. Don’t you see, it is not bit by bit that one reaches it, it is not by a small, constant, regular effort, it is not that: it is something that comes suddenly; it is established without one’s knowing how or why, but all is changed.

And it will be like that for everybody, for the whole universe: it goes on and on, it moves forward very slowly, and then one moment, all of a sudden, it will be done, finished — not finished: it’s the beginning!

(Silence)

It is usually the first contact with the psychic being which brings this experience, but it is only partial, only that part of the consciousness — or of the activity in any part of the being — that part of the consciousness which is united with the psychic has the experience. And so, at the moment of that experience, the position of that part of the consciousness, in relation to the other parts and to the world, is completely reversed, it is different. And that is never undone. And if you have the will or take care or are able to put into contact with this part all the problems of your life and all the activities of your being, all the elements of your consciousness, then they begin to be organised in such a way that your being becomes one unity — a single multiplicity, a multiple unity — complex, but organised and centralised around a fixed point, so well that the central will or central consciousness or central truth has the power to govern all the parts, for they are all in order, organised around this central Presence.

It seems to me impossible to escape from this necessity if one wants to be and is to be a conscious instrument of the divine
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Force. You may be moved, pushed into action and used as unconscious instruments by the divine Force, if you have a minimum of goodwill and sincerity. But to become a conscious instrument, capable of identification and conscious, willed movements, you must have this inner organisation; otherwise you will always be running into a chaos somewhere, a confusion somewhere or an obscurity, an unconsciousness somewhere. And naturally your action, even though guided exclusively by the Divine, will not have the perfection of expression it has when one has acquired a conscious organisation around this divine Centre.

It is an assiduous task, which may be done at any time and under any circumstances, for you carry within yourself all the elements of the problem. You don’t need anything from outside, no outer aid to do this work. But it requires great perseverance, a sort of tenacity, for very often it happens that there are bad “creases” in the being, habits — which come from all sorts of causes, which may come from atavistic malformation or also from education or from the environment you have lived in or from many other causes. And these bad creases you try to smooth out, but they wrinkle up again. And then you must begin the work over again, often, many, many, many a time, without getting discouraged, before the final result is obtained. But nothing and nobody can prevent you from doing it, nor any circumstance. For you carry within yourself the problem and the solution.

(Silence)

And to tell the truth, the most common malady humanity suffers from is boredom. Most of the stupidities men commit come from an attempt to escape boredom. Well, I say for certain that no outer means are any good, and that boredom pursues you and will pursue you no matter what you try to escape from it; but that this way, that is, beginning this work of organising your being and all its movements and all its elements around the central
Consciousness and Presence, this is the surest and most complete cure, and the most comforting, for all possible boredom. It gives life a tremendous interest. And an extraordinary diversity. You no longer have the time to get bored.

Only, one must persevere.

And what adds to the interest of the thing is that this kind of work, this harmonisation and organisation of the being around the divine Centre can only be done in a physical body and on earth. That is truly the essential and original reason for physical life. For, as soon as you are no longer in a physical body, you can no longer do it at all.

And what is still more remarkable is that only human beings can do it, for only human beings have at their centre the divine Presence in the psychic being. For example, this work of self-development and organisation and becoming aware of all the elements is not within the reach of the beings of the vital and mental planes, nor even of the beings who are usually called “gods”; and when they want to do it, when they really want to organise themselves and become completely conscious, they have to take a body.

And yet, human beings come into a physical body without knowing why, most of them go through life without knowing why, they leave their body without knowing why, and they have to begin the same thing all over again, indefinitely, until one day, someone comes along and tells them, “Be careful! you know, there is a purpose to this. You are here for this work, don’t miss your opportunity!”

And how many years are wasted.